

**BETRAYAL AND MORAL IMAGINATION:
A STUDY OF JOSEPH CONRAD'S
FIVE MAJOR WORKS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **BETRAYAL AND MORAL IMAGINATION:
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Chull Wang, Doctor of Philosophy, 1990

Dissertation directed by: Professor Morris Freedman

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A series of Joseph Conrad's five major novels, beginning with *Lord Jim* (1900), followed by *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and concluding with *Victory* (1915), are all concerned with the theme of betrayal. These novels demonstrate Conrad's artistic depth and ultimately provide a better way of understanding his profound "moral imagination."

The "standing jump" Conrad made out of Poland certainly motivated him to speculate diligently and almost exhaustively about the significance of the "jump" or betrayal. Conrad did not, however, remain in a personal realm. He transcended, as Russell Kirk said of T.S. Eliot, 'the barriers of private experience' by shaping his unique experience into a universal art with the power of his moral imagination. His treatment of betrayal is too comprehensive, too artistic to be merely private or personal. The life of Conrad was a ceaseless and always agonizing

struggle, as Eliot said of Shakespeare, "to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal."

It is F.R. Leavis who first noted Conrad's "moral intensity" and thereby placed him in the "Great Tradition" of English literature, along with Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and D.H. Lawrence. Conrad surely occupies his place in the "Great Tradition" not only as an "innovator in form and method" but also as an artist whose "moral intensity" stands out among English writers.

Any study of Conrad should not ignore his passion for "the moral discovery" as well as his "spirit of love for mankind." The "moral discovery" was for Conrad "the object of every tale." It is certainly through such moral imagination that Conrad succeeds in, to borrow Lionel Trilling's phrase, "involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination." It is also through the redeeming and almost healing power of the moral imagination that Conrad's vision as a whole always resists becoming either wholly existential or merely nihilistic.

DEDICATION

To My Mother and Father

To Mi-Young, Ihn-Woo, and the Baby

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Chapter I

Introduction

I should be sorry if I only entertained them [the audience], I wish to make them better.

George Handel

I have always approached my task in the spirit of love for mankind.

Joseph Conrad

It has become established that Joseph Conrad was almost always interested in the act of betrayal and its aftermath. Perhaps it would be more appropriate and more accurate to say that the theme of betrayal is at the very heart of Conrad's fictional universe. Numerous critics have noted that Conrad's Polish background functioned as a source for his almost obsessive concern with the theme of betrayal. As early as 1930, Gustav Morf tried to extract Conrad's guilt complex from his various fiction. According to Morf, many of Conrad's works were ceaseless attempts, by way of art, to justify his "desertion" from his native Poland. *Lord Jim* is, says Morf, "a confession of a man tortured by doubts and nightmarish fears."¹ Morf's analysis of Conrad's guilt complex, though somewhat oversimplified, has some truth in it. Czeslaw Milosz also notes that "a carefully hidden complex of treason is discernible in some of

¹Gustav Morf, *The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad* (London: Sampson, 1930) 149.

[Conrad's] writings--a feeling that he had betrayed the cause so fanatically embraced by his compatriots and, above all, by his father."²

In March 1899, Polish novelist Eliza Orzeszkowa accused Conrad of betraying Poland for financial gains:

I must say that this gentleman, who writes popular and very lucrative novels in English, has almost caused me a nervous breakdown. My gorge rises when I read about him. ... Creative talent forms the very head of the tree, the pinnacle of the tower, the life-blood of the nation. And to take away that flower, to remove that pinnacle, to drain away that life-blood from the nation in order to pass it on to the Anglo-Saxons (who anyway lie on a bed of roses) just because they pay better. ... It is even hard to think about it without shame!³

One may get the impression from Eliza Orzeszkowa's harsh criticism that Conrad became rich in England. But the fact is quite otherwise, as Zdzislaw Najder indicates: "writing never gave him financial security."⁴ It

²Czeslaw Milosz, "Joseph Conrad in Polish Eyes," *The Art of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Symposium*, ed. R.W. Stallman (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1960) 42. See also 35-45.

³Eliza Orzeszkowa, "The Emigration of Talent," *Conrad under Familial Eyes*, trans. Halina Carroll-Najder, ed. Zdzislaw Najder (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) 187-8.

⁴Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1983) 255.

is very likely, as Karl and Najder observe, that Conrad read the article or was informed of it and that he was deeply hurt by the charges of betrayal and desertion.⁵ However unjustifiable or misguided,⁶ her charge of betrayal may have had some impact on the theme of *Lord Jim* which was then being written. The attack may at least have made more poignant Conrad's obsession with the act of betrayal. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the theme of betrayal pervades most of Conrad's major novels following *Lord Jim*, although his earlier works such as *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* contain more or less the same motif.

In *A Personal Record*, one of his autobiographical works, Conrad himself was very conscious of his poignant sense of alienation, a result of his "standing jump" out of his country Poland:

I verily believe mine was the only case of a boy of my nationality and antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing jump out of his racial surroundings and associations.⁷

⁵See Frederick Karl's *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (New York: Farrar, 1979) 9-12, Najder's *Joseph Conrad* 255-6, and Paul Kirschner's *Conrad: The Psychologist as Artist* (Edinburgh: Oliver, 1968) 174.

⁶V.S. Pritchett calls it "foolish": "When one or two Polish critics accused Conrad of 'betraying' his country leaving it to write in a foreign tongue--'for money' one of them [Orzeszkowa] ludicrously said--they were as foolish as those who attack Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, Beckett and Auden for expatriation." See *The Tale Bearers* (New York: Random, 1980) 44. Najder, however, argues that Orzeszkowa should not be "unjustly vilified": "she would not have lashed out at him [Conrad] had she known the facts as they were." See *Conrad under Familial Eyes* xix and *Joseph Conrad* 256.

⁷Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (New York: Doubleday, 1926) 121. All page references of Conrad's works are to this Doubleday edition.

By "a standing jump" Conrad might be alluding to Jim's jump out of the *Patna* in *Lord Jim*, but one should not fail to notice a distinction between Conrad and Jim. Conrad is fully accepting his responsibility for his "standing jump"; whereas Jim, unlike his creator, always tries to evade responsibility for his desertion of the ship, saying, "I had jumped...It seems."⁸ It is perhaps too excessive to generalize, as Morf does, that Jim is Conrad. As Leo Gurko observes, "To pursue Morf's line is to accept the book as the victim of the man, where it deserves to be accepted as a demonstration of his insight and aesthetic power."⁹

The "standing jump" Conrad made at the age of seventeen (1874) may have impelled him to lead forever a marginal and solitary life in his adopted country England. It is thus quite understandable that Conrad could not bear any sense of loss, as Bernard C. Meyer comments on it:

Throughout his adult life, and presumably earlier, Conrad was obsessed by the idea of loss, which included not only the loss of persons but of material objects as well, of things often of insignificant importance. He was forever misplacing or losing objects, often insisting that they were irretrievably lost simply

⁸Conrad, *Lord Jim* 111.

⁹Leo Gurko, *Joseph Conrad: Giant in Exile* (New York: Macmillan, 1979) 17.

because he could not recall where he had put them. Once he had reconciled himself to the idea that they were gone he would become resentful if they were recovered.¹⁰

Indeed, one of the pervasive elements in Conrad's fictional works is "the idea of loss." It is not far from truth to assume that Conrad's marginal life in a foreign country made him extremely conscious of the loss. It seems, however, that Meyer's indication of Conrad's obsession with the loss is rather excessive, for Conrad's concern with the loss derives not entirely from an obsession but from an artistic taste, as shown in his expression of absolute fear of loss:

I have tried to be a sober worker all my life--all my two lives [sea life and writing career]. I did so from taste, no doubt having an instinctive horror of losing my sense of full self-possession, but also from conviction.¹¹

It is not an accident that many of his characters are confronted with an agonizing sense of loss. Axel Heyst (*Victory*), for instance, experiences an overwhelming sense of loss after Lena's death so that he

¹⁰Bernard C. Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967) 49-50.

¹¹Conrad, *A Personal Record* 112.

is unable to cope with it except by committing suicide. The most precious thing one may lose is the self, as Razumov (*Under Western Eyes*) observes:

In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely.¹²

Some of the characters, however, never reach such a revelation and never understand that they are betraying themselves by betraying others.

Conrad once said that "every novel contains an element of autobiography ... since the creator can only express himself in his creation."¹³ It is certainly fascinating and even tempting to seek the direct relationship between the creator and his creation. For example, the relationship between Heyst and his father may be compared to that between Conrad and his father, Apollo Korzeniowski. Like Heyst, Conrad had hardly known his mother because she died when he was so young (1865); like Heyst's father, Conrad's father had to live the life of an expatriate (1862-8); like Heyst, Conrad led a life of "a permanent dweller amongst changing scenes."¹⁴ Yet it would be a critical mistake to assume that Heyst is Conrad. Despite the resemblances, Heyst is no more than an

¹²Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* 301.

¹³Conrad, *A Personal Record* xvii-xviii.

¹⁴Conrad, *Victory* 90-1.

artistic character through whom Conrad presents his vision of life to the world.

There are dangers when one is always eager to hunt "an element of autobiography" in every novel, since in criticism one is not seeking a personal myth or cult but a universal truth about human beings. The critic's real task is, to use T.S. Eliot's phrase, "the elucidation of works of art"¹⁵ rather than a mere source hunting. One also has to bear in mind that the very personal experience becomes something impersonal during the process of composition. It may sound odd to quote Eliot at this point (because Conrad said that "every novel contains an element of autobiography"), yet Eliot's words are quite relevant to Conrad: the artistic process should be "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."¹⁶ In this context, Stephen Dedalus's elaborate statement of the artist in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* should be taken seriously:

The artist, like the God of the creation, remains *within* or *behind* or *beyond* or *above* his handiwork, invisible, refined out of

¹⁵T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1932) 13.

¹⁶Eliot, *Selected Essays* 7. Morton Dauwen Zabel notes: Conrad "would have endorsed Eliot's sentence which his own preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* to some degree anticipated: 'The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates'." See Zabel's "Chance and Recognition," *The Art of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Stallman, 27.

existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails. (*Italics added*)¹⁷

Despite the obvious relations between Conrad's personal experience and his works, one always has to go beyond that level. The great artist is not content merely to testify to his own experience in his works but to make it something rich and universal. André Gide once wrote:

Conrad did not like to talk about his life; a sort of modesty, a lack of regard for himself restrained him and kept him silent on his past. His memories of the sea seemed to him now only the raw material for his art, and, because the requirements of his art, as they became involved, constrained him to *transpose*, to *depersonalize* and *distance* from himself by fiction everything he had experienced personally, he was singularly awkward, both in his books and in his conversation, as a raconteur; only in fiction did he feel at ease. (*Italics added*)¹⁸

Conrad was ceaselessly rendering his experience as an "outcast" into something universal in human nature. Conrad would not have been placed in "the Great Tradition" by F.R. Leavis had he not attained such

¹⁷James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking, 1967) 215.

¹⁸André Gide, "Joseph Conrad," *The Art of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Stallman, 4.

universality.

For instance, the pervasive sense of loss in Conrad's major works is not merely a reflection of his own sense of loss or a testimony that he was psychologically crippled but "a way of art" that enabled him to penetrate into the psyche of the modern man. As J.I.M. Stewart remarks, "the story of a Fall and of a Paradise lost to us is, of all our myths, perhaps the one most immemorially central to the human imagination."¹⁹ It is, then, no exaggeration to say that Conrad's prose is highly suggestive of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867) which prophesied modern man's loss:

The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world. (21-8)

¹⁹J.I.M. Stewart, "Conrad," *Eight Modern Writers* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1963) 199. Stewart further notes: "It is the grand characteristic of Conrad's art that, wherever it takes us, the scene universalizes itself even as that art begins to speak" (198).

Arnold's poetry crystallizes modern man's irretrievable loss of "Faith." It should be noted that Arnold's "Sea of Faith" does not merely indicate faith in God but faith in humanity and its life-enhancing values, or to use Conrad's phrase, "faith in himself and others."²⁰ Poetry was for Arnold "the interpreters of the moral world,"²¹ and prose was for Conrad an interpreter of the moral world.²²

Both Arnold and Conrad knew that something was lost in their age and that more loss was imminent. Jim in the Patuan island, Decoud in the Isabel, and Heyst in the so-called "Round Island" lead "the sea of life ensiled" that Arnold described in his poem "Switzerland":

Yes! in the sea of life ensiled,
 With echoing straits between us thrown,
 Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
 We mortal millions live *alone*. (5.1-4)

²⁰Conrad, *Nostramo* 496.

²¹Matthew Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical* (New York: Everyman, 1906) 68.

²²Joyce Cary observes: "We know that the building is there to give us a certain experience of beauty, and so we know that the book is there to give us a certain experience of moral beings in action." See Joyce Cary's *Art and Reality: Ways of the Creative Process* (New York: Harper, 1958) 151. Golden L. Larsen suggests that Joyce Cary owes a lot to Conrad. For a more detailed discussion, see Larsen's *The Dark Descent: Social Change and Moral Responsibility in the Novels of Joyce Cary* (New York: Roy, 1966) 1-21.

Arnold reminds that what once was "a single continent" ("Switzerland" 16) has become the "poor fragments of a broken world" ("Obermann Once More" 217). Heyst's life resembles that of modern man "enlisted" from others. Razumov yearns for an island where he can secure solitude: "I wish I were in the middle of some field miles away from everywhere."²³ Nostromo and Decoud are miles apart even while they are being engaged in the same work:

Decoud pumped without intermission. Nostromo steered without relaxing for a second the intense, peering effort of his stare. Each of them was as if *utterly alone* with his task. ... There was *nothing in common* between them ... [T]hey seemed to have become *completely estranged*, as if they had discovered in the very shock of the collision that the loss of the lighter would not mean the same thing to them both. This common danger brought their differences in aim, in view, in character, and in position, into absolute prominence in *the private vision of each*. There was *no bond* of conviction, of common idea; they were merely two adventurers pursuing each his own adventure, involved in the same imminence of deadly *pail*. *Therefore they had nothing to say to*

²³Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* 289-90.

each other. (Italics added)²⁴

Modern men as such, Conrad notes, "are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel."²⁵ It is no wonder that John Batchelor reads Conrad because he finds in Conrad "the *loneliness* of human beings caught and communicated with a vividness unsurpassed in any other writer."²⁶

As numerous critics have noted, Conrad's lifelong interest in the act of betrayal should not be treated separately from his strong sense of fidelity to human solidarity. Indeed, a breach of human solidarity is a kind of betrayal. In his Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad speaks of the artist as one who speaks

to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity.

The artist's ultimate responsibility is to "awaken in the hearts of the

²⁴Conrad, *Nostromo* 295.

²⁵Conrad, *Victory* 3.

²⁶John Batchelor, *The Edwardian Novelists* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982) 28.

beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity."²⁷

Adam Gillon perceptively describes Conrad's stress on human solidarity as follows: "No transgression against this human solidarity remains unpunished--in Conrad's books, at any rate. The supreme sin, to Conrad, is failure to be loyal, which in more extreme form is betrayal."²⁸ Gillon is absolutely correct when he regards the theme of betrayal as crucial in Conrad's art, but his generalization, unless qualified, is an oversimplification. Certainly, some of the characters such as Jim (*Lord Jim*), Nostromo (*Nostromo*), and Razumov (*Under Western Eyes*) get punished in one way or another because of their betrayal, but there is always somebody in the Conradian world who, despite the act of betrayal, never gets punished: Brown (*Lord Jim*), some of the revolutionists (*Nostromo*), some of the anarchists (*The Secret Agent*), Peter Ivanovitch (*Under Western Eyes*) and Schomberg (*Victory*) all remain intact though they more than deserve to be punished.

Other critics also tend to overgeneralize Conrad's treatment of betrayal. Steve Ressler, a recent critic, understands Conrad's characterization of betrayal in terms of "betrayal, guilt and punishment" and consequently fails to discuss *The Secret Agent* which is virtually

²⁷Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* xiv.

²⁸Adam Gillon, *The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad* (New York: Bookman, 1960) 118. See also the chapter "The Anatomy of Betrayal," 109-40.

crowded by betrayers.²⁹ Such a pre-figured label of betrayal-guilt-punishment may be able to explain the fates of guilt-ridden heroes, but other remorseless and conscienceless betrayers not only elude such a narrow categorization but will play a diabolic role as long as the world exists. It is unrealistic to ask Conrad that he have every betrayer get punished. One cannot impose a sort of ultimate justice upon the betrayers who are devoid of humanity and who feel no remorse no matter what they do to others. (One may nevertheless argue, I would agree, that Conrad's heavy use of irony in *The Secret Agent* achieves a kind of poetic justice by keeping the reader from any sympathetic identification with the characters, the anarchists in particular.) Irony, however, is not an ultimate justice.

Jackson W. Heimer, too, oversimplifies Conrad's theme of betrayal. He argues that there are two kinds of betrayers in Conrad's novels: "the character unaware of his betrayal either because he is not acute enough to understand the act or because he has no moral values" and "the character who comes to understand his act because he has at the same time an ideal conception of himself." The characters like "Cornelius, Gould, Verloc, and Jones" belong to the first group, and the

²⁹Steve Ressler, *Joseph Conrad: Consciousness and Integrity* (New York: New York UP, 1988) 5. The discussion of Conrad's "integrity" would be incomplete without that of *The Secret Agent* which F.R. Leavis believes is "one of the two unquestionable classics of the first order that [Conrad] added to the English novel." In *The Eternal Solitary*, Gillon also fails to discuss *The Secret Agent*, but he discusses it later in *Joseph Conrad* (Boston: Twayne, 1982) 112-22.

characters like "Jim, Nostromo, Decoud, Monygham, Razumov, Anthony, and Heyst" are of the second.³⁰ Heimer further argues that the first group go through a pattern of betrayal-confession-attempted redemption-punishment, while the second group do not go through such a phase and "are not punished for their act [of betrayal]." According to Heimer, "Conrad finds [the second] group of little significance." Such a generalization is far-fetched, however. It should be noted, first of all, that sometimes there is no clear line between the "aware" characters and the "unaware" characters. Conrad either blurs the line or finds human action too complicated to draw the line.³¹ As Gurko sharply notes, Conrad "begins with the traditional questions of good and evil, right and wrong, responsible and irresponsible behavior. But he soon arrives at the conviction that the familiar distinctions among them are no longer verifiable and perhaps not even defensible."³² Secondly, even though one takes Heimer's classification for granted it is not simply true that the second group is "of little significance." Any character in Conrad's novels

³⁰Jackson W. Heimer, "Patterns of Betrayal in the Novels of Joseph Conrad," *Ball State University Forum* 8.iii (1967): 34. Heimer's classification is hardly new. Long before him, Gillon classified betrayers into three categories: betrayers "who exhibit self-pity at their own weakness and their subsequent plight (Almayer, Willems, Kayerts)"; the sympathetic betrayers "who are not only subject to a severe inner conflict resulting from their act of unfaithfulness, but who also inflict the punishment for it upon themselves" (such as Jim, Razumov, Nostromo, and Lingard); betrayers who "have no remorse because they have no conscience." See *The Eternal Solitary* 118.

³¹See *Lord Jim* 34. Marlow notes: "each of us has a guardian angel" and "each of us has a familiar devil as well." No easy distinction between angel and devil can be made.

³²Gurko, *Joseph Conrad* xi.

is as important as another. Cornelius may be a minor character (or betrayer) yet contributes significantly to one's understanding of Jim's character. Perhaps, Gould as a character is, if not more, as important as Nostromo. Jones as a character is as important as Heyst.

What seems to complicate Conrad's theme of betrayal and human solidarity is a continual presence of skepticism. How could one justify or explain Conrad's skepticism if one takes seriously his sense of fidelity to human solidarity? Conrad once thought of the universe as "a knitting machine" which "knits us in" and "knits us out" and in which "there is no morality, no knowledge and no hope."³³ Is Conrad here saying that because we can find "no morality, no knowledge and no hope" the only thing we can do is to be aware of the tragic human existence in this "knitting machine"? It is then understandable why some critics vigorously argue for a nihilistic vision in Conrad and why so many critics also find an existential vision in Conrad. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, thinks of Conrad as "an explorer of modern perspectivism and nihilism."³⁴ Miller, however, ignores the fact that Conrad's strong commitment to life-enhancing values almost always counterbalances his nihilism or existentialism. While undoubtedly profound, the element of nihilism or

³³C.T. Watts, ed., *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunningham Graham* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969) 57, 71. In his introduction, Watts observes that "Hardy's view of Nature as the inhuman 'automation'" may be reflected in Conrad's idea of "knitting machine" (25).

³⁴J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965) 6. See also 13-67.

existentialism in Conrad's art cannot be an ultimate vision as long as the life-enhancing values like "faith, honor and fidelity to truth" firmly occupy the Conradian universe. (This study, however, is in no way saying or suggesting that existentialism is necessarily in conflict with moral issues.)

Edward Said provides a flexible and discriminatory view about the nature of Conrad's skepticism (though he, too often, singles out the existential side of Conrad). Said maintains that Conrad's world view had been changed. He observes that the Great War (1914-1918) was a turning point: Conrad thought of the universe as the knitting machine before the War but after the War he began to see "non-mechanistic existence."³⁵ This study is basically in accordance with Said's perceptive argument that Conrad's skepticism experienced a transformation at some point, but differs from Said's as to when the change occurred. The change was far from a dramatic one. The Great War had little impact on Conrad's outlook, as Najder suggests:

[Conrad] seems to be the only major European writer of his time whose outlook did not change as a result of World War I, and perhaps the only one who would not have been surprised by the

³⁵Edward Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966) 75.

emergence of the modern totalitarian state.³⁶

Najder, on the other hand, refuses or fails to see the change in Conrad. In spite of their disagreement, one can nevertheless benefit from two opposing views. Conrad's world view was modified little by little. A visible change is noticeable in *Under Western Eyes* in which, as Avrom Fleishman suggests, Razumov's solipsistic skepticism is replaced by a strong sense of remorse and finally becomes integrated into the sense of "community."³⁷ *Victory*, more than any other work, is truly a culminating achievement in light of Conrad's world view as far as the major novels are concerned, in which Heyst eloquently but tragically testifies to the necessity of life-affirmation:

[W]oe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life.³⁸

F.R. Leavis best epitomizes the very core of Conrad's world view by noting:

³⁶Najder, "Conrad in His Historical Perspective," *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad*, ed. Ted Billy (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987) 26.

³⁷See Avrom Fleishman's *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1967). Maintaining that Conrad's novels "must be read as dramatic expressions of a complex political imagination," Fleishman presents Conrad's "Vision of Community."

³⁸Conrad, *Victory* 410.

[T]he victory is a victory over skepticism, a victory of life.³⁹

This study is not in any way suggesting that skepticism was something that Conrad had to totally eliminate. On the contrary, the validity of Conrad's profound skepticism is fully appreciated, without which Conrad could not have done such exhaustive studies of betrayal. It is indeed through his skepticism that Conrad was able to investigate the human psyche behind the act of betrayal. One could not imagine Martin Decoud and Dr. Monygham (*Nostromo*) without their penetrating skepticism. Skepticism is not a negative force in Conrad's art but, as he wrote to John Galsworthy, "the agent of truth--the way of art and salvation."⁴⁰ It is through his "agent of truth" that Conrad was ceaselessly able to question what is behind Jim's desertion (*Lord Jim*), Nostromo's theft of the fatal silver ingots (*Nostromo*), Verloc's professional betrayal (*The Secret Agent*), Razumov's self-justifying betrayal of his friend Haldin (*Under Western Eyes*), and Heyst's deplorable detachment and his inability to return Lena's love (*Victory*).

What Conrad tried to eliminate was skepticism for the sake of skepticism and any blind adherence to skepticism *per se*. The fate of Martin Decoud (*Nostromo*) is exemplary in this aspect. It is obvious that

³⁹F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto, 1948) 202.

⁴⁰Georges Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 1927) 1: 301.

Decoud shares with Conrad a shrewd skepticism through which he is able to provide an astute insight into the world of Costaguana and its politics. It is Decoud alone, perhaps apart from Dr. Monygham, who is capable of seeing things clearly and without any illusion:

There is a curse of futility upon our character: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption.⁴¹

Nobody else in the novel provides the more poignant and more piercing criticism on the political situation of Costaguana. One can almost get the impression that Conrad himself is expressing his political vision by borrowing Decoud's voice. One should not be surprised to see that the memorable expressions in *Nostromo* appear mostly in Decoud's voice. Such resemblance between Conrad and Decoud made Leavis declare:

In fact, Decoud may be said to have had a considerable part in the writing of *Nostromo*; or one might say that *Nostromo* was written by a Decoud who wasn't a complacent dilettante.⁴²

⁴¹Conrad, *Nostromo* 171.

⁴²Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 200.

Yet Decoud, as Leavis also observes, cannot be all Conrad, since the inability to maintain a "faith in himself and others" clearly differentiates Decoud from his creator. Decoud's suicide is, then, an inevitable result of his "intellectual audacity." As Albert Guerard notes, Conrad "attempts to condemn himself by proxy."⁴³

Although Conrad never completely abandoned or discarded his Decoud-like skepticism, he never lost a "faith in himself and others." Accordingly, Conrad's world view shifted from that of the "knitting machine" to that of the creed of "undying hope":

To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so.⁴⁴

Conrad never says, because of his lifelong skepticism, that the world is good. Instead, he says that we can make it *livable* as long as we keep hope and faith alive.

To add to the critical disagreement, there seems to be a lack of attention for the possible meanings and implications of the word betrayal.

⁴³Albert Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958) 199.

⁴⁴Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 8-9.

Many critics discuss the theme of betrayal without addressing or defining the term. They perhaps think the word betrayal is too obvious and too simple to need any kind of definition. Razumov's speculation, however, testifies how seriously Conrad thought of the implications and meanings of it:

Betray. A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his own conscience.⁴⁵

Remarkably, Razumov addresses here the very theme of Conrad's major works: "a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart." According to Razumov, the most serious betrayal is that of one's own conscience. His speculation underlines at least one dimension that the word betrayal might evoke and imply. But his definition needs amplification to become comprehensive. What Razumov does not understand at this stage is, first, that one can betray others without the slightest sense of violating a social code and consequently one's own conscience; and, secondly, that Razumov is too self-justifying and too solipsistic to give primal importance to others who are betrayed.

⁴⁵Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* 37.

Razumov's solipsistic definition of the term betrayal is problematic, for it raises a serious question: Is the act of betrayal justifiable as long as one's own conscience remains clear and intact? If so, the betrayer in "The Informer," for instance, may be fully vindicated: "I have been thwarting, deceiving, and betraying you--from conviction."⁴⁶ The question is of course a delicate one. Yet it will be too naive to assume that any means including deception and lies can be excused if done "from conviction."

Marlow's definition provides something that Razumov's does not implicate:

The real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind.⁴⁷

While Razumov is stressing the importance of one's self Marlow gives more importance to "faith with the community of mankind." In other words, Marlow's focus is on human solidarity.

Jackson W. Heimer seems to be in accord with Marlow, as he defines betrayal as follows: "Since one man is bound to another he is bound to all, and hence owes an obligation to all men. Each man must

⁴⁶Conrad, *A Set of Six* 97.

⁴⁷Conrad, *Lord Jim* 157.

live and act in the world of men. If he isolates himself from the world he becomes guilty of the most insidious betrayal: the betrayal of the human bond."⁴⁸ By defining betrayal as that of "the human bond" Heimer points out Conrad's emphasis on human solidarity. But he fails to notice that Razumov's assertion of importance of one's self is as important as one's responsibility to others. Conrad never says that one is more important than the other. There should be a balance between one's fidelity to solidarity and one's responsibility to one's self. A one-sided discussion would diminish the depth and complexity of Conrad's theme of betrayal.

Comparing Conrad with Schopenhauer, Bruce Johnson clarifies a significant difference, in that, unlike Schopenhauer who "suggests that the brotherhood of man is achieved by the denial of ego," Conrad never seeks "nirvana or selflessness" in his works and, instead, emphasizes "the sanctity of individual ego."⁴⁹ Johnson's indication of Conrad's stress on individual sanctity seems absolutely correct, even though Johnson, in turn, makes too much of existentialism in Conrad's art.

The Conradian meanings and connotations of the word betrayal must be more inclusive and broader. The real definition of the term betrayal can be made by combining Razumov's rather solipsistic, but

⁴⁸Jackson W. Heimer, "Patterns of Betrayal" 33.

⁴⁹Bruce Johnson, *Conrad's Models of Mind* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971) 47.

somewhat justifiable, definition of the term and Marlow's self-negating, but equally justifiable, definition of it. By the same token, the word betrayal can be defined by complementing Heimer's and Johnson's views. Betrayal is neither that of one's own conscience alone nor that of communal human bond alone. Rather, one should be accountable for both. What is at stake in the act of betrayal is not merely one's self but others. Equal importance should be given to the betrayer and the betrayed. In other words, humanity itself is jeopardized, for humanity consists of both public and private identity.

One distinct advantage of such a definition is that it may be able to explain all the betrayers in a much broader perspective. Critics are usually reluctant to discuss *Victory* in terms of the theme of betrayal as if it had no element of the betrayal motif.⁵⁰ But there are at least two obvious betrayals in the work. First, it goes without saying that Schomberg and the diabolic trio ("plain" Mr. Jones, Martin Ricardo, and Pedro) are betraying humanity. One should also perceive Heyst's betrayal: his philosophy of non-involvement or perfect aloofness is unquestionably "a breach of faith with the community of mankind"; he also commits

⁵⁰See Heimer's "Patterns of Betrayal" 31. Heimer is one of the few who sees that the theme of betrayal is at the center of *Victory*: "Jones betrays Heyst by attempting to defraud him, and Heyst betrays all men by refusing to become involved in human affairs." Yet he fails to note that the real betrayal of the diabolic trio including Jones is not merely that of Heyst but of humanity in general and that Heyst's betrayal is not only that of human solidarity but of his true self. See also Helen Funk Rieselbach's *Conrad's Rebels: The Psychology of Revolution in the Novels from Nostromo to Victory* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985) 113, and Gillon's *Joseph Conrad* 139. Gillon thinks of betrayal as the lightmotiv of the novel.

another form of betrayal, in the sense that his true self is utterly neglected or negated in consequence of his willful alienation. At the same time, the betrayals by Schomberg's male customers and Heyst's servant Wang should be taken seriously.

Such an inclusive definition makes it possible to detect modern writers who take an interest in the theme of betrayal. D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, for example, is a work which can be explained in terms of the theme of betrayal. Lawrence makes it clear that the relationship between Gerald and Gudrun never becomes humane: they immerse themselves in a destructive, futile sexual game and thereby betray sanctity of sexual love. Lawrence's real sense of betrayal is more vividly shown in his characterization of Loerke who is "a gnawing little negation, gnawing at the roots of life."⁵¹

There are other modern writers who also explore modern man's betrayal of humanity. George Orwell's *1984* depicts a devastating aspect of society in which humanity is suffocated. Forster's *A Passage to India* shows the theme of betrayal in the international scale: British rulers' imperialistic arrogance is, in a broad sense, a betrayal of humanity. People's inability "to connect" is for Forster a betrayal. The theme of betrayal is literally pervasive throughout Graham Greene's many novels

⁵¹D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (New York: Penguin, 1976) 419. For a more detailed discussion of Loerke, see George A. Panichas, *Adventure in Consciousness: The Meaning of D.H. Lawrence's Religious Quest* (London: Mouton, 1964) 151-79. Panichas discusses Lawrence's "vision of evil," extensively and persuasively comparing Loerke with Svidrigaylov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

such as *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and Glory* and others.

One should not fail to notice that Conrad is also speculating to a certain extent the mythical dimension of betrayal, notably in his *Under Western Eyes* and *Victory*. Though not knowing how Haldin met death, Mrs. Haldin miraculously penetrates into the heart of the matter by observing: "Even amongst the Apostles of Christ there was found a Judas."⁵² Of course it is an exaggeration to compare Haldin's betrayal of Razumov with Judas's betrayal of Christ. Razumov's fate can be compared to that of Oedipus: as Oedipus puts out his eyes because of his sin (or betrayal), Razumov chooses to let his ear-drums get crushed. The island of Samburan can be compared to a paradise where Heyst and Lena live as if they were Adam and Eve. Heyst even compares himself to Adam: "There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all."⁵³ Lena is called "princess of Samburan."⁵⁴ The paradise is doomed because of the Satanic trio. As in the case of *Under Western Eyes*, the literal application of the biblical story to *Victory* is not quite fitting. Yet the biblical allusion nevertheless enhances complexity of Conrad's theme of betrayal. There is even an allusion to the Faust legend in which Faust sells his soul to Mephistopheles. Razumov has something of both Faust and Mephistopheles. He, like Faust, sells his soul by betraying his friend

⁵²Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* 115.

⁵³Conrad, *Victory* 173.

⁵⁴Conrad, *Victory* 193.

and, like Mephistopheles, exults over his bargain and laughs a "Mephistophelian laughter."⁵⁵

The historical dimension of betrayal is also suggested: Peter Ivanovitch exasperates Razumov by suggesting that "There is something of a Brutus [in you]."⁵⁶ Like Brutus who betrayed and killed Caesar, Razumov betrays his friend Haldin. There are also Shakespearean references, as Adam Gillon observes: "The common dramatic and psychological situation of [*Under Western Eyes*] and of *Macbeth* is the betrayal of a trusting guest."⁵⁷

The discussion of the theme of betrayal would be incomplete without addressing the problem of making a choice. For some characters making a choice is virtually impossible and they are nevertheless forced to do so. In most cases they make a wrong choice and thereby betray others. Said's generalization of the "either/or posture" in Conradian characters addresses the issue admirably: "There is no middle way, and there is no other method of putting the issues. Either one allows that meaningless chaos is the hopeless restriction upon human behavior, or one must admit that order and significance depend only upon man's will

⁵⁵Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* 60. See also 245, 253. Sophia Antonovna also is compared to Mephistopheles.

⁵⁶Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* 208.

⁵⁷Gillon, *Joseph Conrad* 126.

to live at all costs. This, of course, is the Schopenhauerian dilemma."⁵⁸ Bruce Johnson also puts it in existential terms: a Conrad hero is "unable to feel it is *he* who has done so."⁵⁹

Making a choice hardly matters for some characters. Verloc and other anarchists (*The Secret Agent*) ironically feed themselves on professional betrayals and never show any moral conflicts in making a choice. It is perhaps too easy for them to make a decision. The "either/or posture" is seldom found in their behavior.

The theme of betrayal is not only present in Conrad's novels but also in some of the tales such as "Heart of Darkness," "Informer," and "The Secret Sharer." "The Secret Sharer" is illuminating in terms of betrayal motif, though the act never actually occurs. Under normal circumstances the proper thing the captain has to do is to surrender Leggatt (who killed a rebellious crew member in another ship) to the appropriate authorities and let them punish him, but the captain intuitively senses that there should be something that ultimately transcends the rigidly inflexible justice system, or to quote Leavis, "the inescapable need for individual moral judgment, and for moral conviction that is strong enough to forget codes and to defy law and codified

⁵⁸Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* 13.

⁵⁹Johnson, *Conrad's Models of Mind* 14.

morality and justice."⁶⁰ The situation the captain is in can be an existential "either/or," but he firmly withstands the circumstantial pressures and never even thinks of betraying Leggatt to others. The captain finally lets Leggatt (his *Doppelgänger*) swim to safety by sailing extremely close to the shoreline. In this sense, the captain in "The Secret Sharer" can be a foil to others who surrender themselves to their blind will for the purpose of self-preservation and commit betrayal. The captain is one of few courageous men in the Conradian world who would not evade his own responsibility.

A series of Conrad's five major novels, beginning with *Lord Jim* (1900), followed by *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and concluding with *Victory* (1915), are all concerned with the theme of betrayal, demonstrating Conrad's artistic depth in his treatment of the theme of betrayal and ultimately providing a better way of understanding Conrad's moral imagination. By "moral imagination" this study is more or less referring to an inseparable alliance of the moral and the imaginative in Conrad's works. The phrase "moral imagination" need not be redefined, for it has been already defined and established by several distinguished scholars.

First of all, Russell Kirk elucidates the phrase in his impressive discussion of T.S. Eliot:

⁶⁰Leavis, *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (London: Chatto, 1967) 114.

Now what is the moral imagination? The phrase is Edmund Burke's. By it, Burke meant that power of ethical perception which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and events of the moment--"especially," as the dictionary has it, "the higher form of this power exercised in poetry and art." The moral imagination aspires to the apprehending of right order in the soul and right order in the commonwealth.⁶¹

Kirk hails Eliot as "the principal champion of the moral imagination in the twentieth century." Kirk's use of Edmund Burke's phrase "moral imagination" is extremely helpful for understanding Conrad's moral universe. The "power of ethical perception which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and events of the moment" is strikingly Conradian. The "standing jump" Conrad made out of Poland certainly motivated him to speculate diligently and almost exhaustively about the significance of the "jump" or betrayal. Conrad did not, however, remain in a personal realm. He transcended "the barriers of private experience" by shaping his unique experience into a universal art with the power of his moral imagination. His treatment of betrayal is too comprehensive,

⁶¹Russell Kirk, *T.S. Eliot and His Age: T.S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (La Salle: Sherwood, 1984) 7. See also Fleishman's *Conrad's Politics* 55-77. Fleishman discusses Conrad's politics in connection with Burke's "organicism."

too artistic to be merely private or personal. The life of Conrad was a ceaseless and always agonizing struggle, as Eliot said of Shakespeare, "to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal."⁶²

Lionel Trilling also is an advocate of the "moral imagination." Calling the novel "the most effective agent of the moral imagination," Trilling hails the merit and strength of "the moral imagination":

[I]ts greatness and its practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it. It taught us ... the extent of human variety and the value of this variety.⁶³

What Trilling describes about the moral imagination in general can be exactly applied to Conrad's novels. Indeed, Conrad's novels make the reader involved "in the moral life" and invite him to scrutinize "his own

⁶²Eliot, *Selected Essays* 117.

⁶³Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1953) 214-5. See also Daniel Melnick's "The Morality of Conrad's Imagination," *Joseph Conrad: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea, 1986) 120. Melnick similarly observes: "Conrad's fiction calls upon the reader to take up the responsibility for moral exploration and judgment that arises from the experience of reading such work."

motives."

It is F.R. Leavis who first notes Conrad's "moral intensity" and thereby places him in the "Great Tradition" of English literature, along with Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and D.H. Lawrence. Leavis specifically uses the phrase "moral imagination":

Nostromo is a masterpiece of "form" in senses of the term congenial to the discussion of Flaubert's art, but to appreciate Conrad's "form" is to take stock of a process of relative valuation conducted by him in the face of life: what do men live by? what *can* men live by?--these are the questions that animate his theme. ... The dramatic imagination at work is an intensely moral imagination, the vividness of which is inalienably a judging and a valuing.⁶⁴

Leavis calls one's attention to Conrad's "preoccupation with 'form'"--"a responsibility involving, of its very nature, imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination and judgment of relative human value."⁶⁵ Indeed, Conrad firmly occupies his place in the "Great Tradition" not only as an "innovator in form and method" but also as an artist whose "moral

⁶⁴Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 30.

⁶⁵Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 29.

seriousness" or "moral intensity" stands out among English writers.

Martin Price's definition of the phrase should be informative. Price, too, uses the term in its most aesthetic sense as he discusses Conrad's two major works, *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*. By "moral imagination," Price means "the depth and adequacy of the novelist's conception of experience; the degree to which he recognizes the complexities of decision or action or inaction and the effort or release involved in solving or ignoring or evading problems."⁶⁶ Conrad's use of irony, Price argues, is something that tells about his moral imagination.

Perhaps there is no better place than the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* to find Conrad's own sense of the moral imagination specified:

[Art] is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential--their one illuminating and convincing quality--the very truth of their very existence.⁶⁷

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the

⁶⁶Martin Price, *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) xii.

⁶⁷Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* xi.

written word[,] to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you *see*. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm--all you demand--and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.⁶⁸

Conrad approached his task "in tenderness and faith"⁶⁹ as well as "in the spirit of love for mankind."⁷⁰

The narrator in *Under Western Eyes*, it seems, crystallizes Conrad's moral imagination most memorably:

The task [of the narrator] is ... the rendering ... of the *moral conditions* ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface; conditions not easily to be understood, much less discovered in the limits of a story, till some key-word is found; a word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the pages, a word which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the *moral discovery* which should be the object of every tale. (Italics added)⁷¹

⁶⁸Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* xiv.

⁶⁹Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* xiv.

⁷⁰Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 2: 73.

⁷¹Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* 67.

Conrad's task was, then, a ceaseless attempt to find "the right word and the right accent" through which he sought to "move the world."⁷²

Any study of Conrad should not ignore his compassionate feeling for human beings or his passion for "the moral discovery." Irving Howe's criticism of Conrad's insensitivity to misery is thus far-fetched: Conrad denies his characters, says Howe, "the mildest claims to dignity and redemption. ... So peevish an irony must have its source less in zeal or anger than in some distemper."⁷³ So is E.M. Forster's judgment: "the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel"; "he does not respect all humanity. Indeed, were he less self-conscious, he would probably be a misanthrope."⁷⁴ Instead of insensitivity to misery or "a vapour," the Conradian casket contains "a jewel"--"the spirit of love for mankind" and the moral passion which awakens "our sympathetic imagination, to which alone we can look for the ultimate triumph of concord and justice."⁷⁵ It is through the redeeming and almost healing power of the moral imagination that Conrad's vision as a whole always resists becoming either wholly existential or merely nihilistic.

⁷²Conrad, *A Personal Record* xiv.

⁷³Irving Howe, *The Politics and the Novel* (Greenwich: Fawcett, 1967) 99. Howe uses the phrase in relation to *The Secret Agent* which, he thinks, is "a relentless mill in which character after character is being ground to dust" (98).

⁷⁴E.M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Meridian, 1955) 131, 132.

⁷⁵Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 84.

Chapter II

Lord Jim

A great writer is a man impelled by a deep irresistible sense of responsibility and he appeals to a deep sense of responsibility in us.

F.R. Leavis

[Artist] can no more escape influencing the moral taste ... than a setter of fashions in furniture and dress can fill the shops with his designs and leave the garniture of persons and houses unaffected by his industry.

George Eliot

1

Lord Jim (1900) is Conrad's first major novel that explores rather exhaustively the theme of betrayal. Every character in the novel is a sort of "lens" through which Jim's betrayal can be measured.¹ However accurate or inaccurate, the lens can be crucial for one's understanding of Conrad's theme of betrayal. Conrad's impressionistic narrative plays a significant role in providing multiple lenses through which Jim's jump can be adequately seen. Jim's behavior is juxtaposed and contrasted on multiple levels. There is no single lens in the text that can absolutely determine one's view of Jim. In this respect, Conrad's method is

¹Donald C. Yelton uses the term "lens." See his *Mimesis and Metaphor* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967) 266. See also Guérard's *Conrad the Novelist* 171.

somewhat similar to Robert Browning's, as A.C. Ward observes: "Just as Browning in *The Ring and the Book* tells Pompilia's story again and again from different points of view, so Conrad introduces a number of characters for the purpose of considering the problem from their differing angles."² Guerard, too, remarks similarly: "Page by page, *Lord Jim*'s consistent great appeal largely depends on its changing of the lens, on its sudden shifts from a distant and often nebulous moral perspective to a grossly and superbly material foreground."³

The variety of lenses testifies to how difficult it is to achieve understanding about a man and his motives. One cannot simply dismiss Jim's betrayal as cowardice or ignore the enormous importance of it. One should not rely on "a fixed standard of conduct" (50). In the novel, to use Leavis's phrase, "there is an insistence on the inescapable need for individual moral judgment, and for moral conviction that is strong enough and courageous enough to forget codes and to defy law and codified morality and justice."⁴ As Marlow notes, the reader's task is, then, to "interpret for himself from the language of facts" (340). The

²A.C. Ward, *Twentieth-Century English Literature, 1901-1960* (New York: Barnes, 1964) 55. See also A.S. Collins's *English Literature of the Twentieth Century* (London: University Tutorial, 1951) 191. Pompilia's story is told from nine different points of view. Also, one may recall Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* in which the author presents the decline of the South through multiple eyes. In this respect, Conrad's influence on Faulkner is formidable.

³Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 171.

⁴Leavis, *Anna Karenina* 114. The phrase actually comes from his impressive discussion of "The Secret Sharer."

novel ultimately invites the reader, to use Trilling's phrase, "to put his own motives under examination." Melnick, too, observes: Conrad's "deepest moral commitment is located ... in [his] reliance on the reader's ability to use his own imagination."⁵

2

J. Hillis Miller described *Lord Jim* as "a chain of repetitions, each event referring back to others which it both explains and is explained by, while at the same time it prefigures those which will occur in the future."⁶ It is absolutely true that a "jump" almost always prefigures another "jump." Jim's fatal desertion of the *Patna* is precisely anticipated by the training ship incident in which Jim fails to jump for the rescue work. Jim used to imagine himself as a hero in "the sea-life of light literature":

He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered

⁵Melnick, "The Morality of Conrad's Imagination" 115.

⁶Miller, "Repetition as Subversion of Organic Form," *Joseph Conrad*, ed. Bloom, 174.

reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men--always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.⁷

His dream of "valorous deeds," however, does not go beyond narcissism, as shown in his failure to jump. Yet Jim does not blame himself but others for his own failure:

He had been taken unawares--and he whispered to himself a malediction upon the waters and the firmament, upon the ship, upon the men. Everything betrayed him! (95)

It is ludicrous and almost absurd to see that he even blames sky and earth for his own failure.

Compared with Jim's desertion of the *Patna* along with others, the training ship incident is a minor one. It does not bring any sort of public shame or disgrace and is rather a good chance for Jim to educate himself, as the captain sympathetically says, "This will teach you to be smart" (8). Had he learned a lesson from the incident, he would not have

⁷Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York: Doubleday, 1926) 6. Subsequent references are to this Doubleday edition and pagination is provided parenthetically within the text.

jumped out of the *Patna*, leaving eight hundred pilgrims to their fate.

The "romantic feeling of reality," if undisciplined, can be "a curse," as Conrad notes:

[T]he romantic feeling of reality was in me an inborn faculty. This in itself may be a curse but when disciplined by a sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of the hard facts of existence shared with the rest of mankind becomes but a point of view from which the very shadows of life appear endowed with an internal glow. And such romanticism is not a sin. It is none the worse for the knowledge of truth. It only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers a certain aspect of beauty.⁸

Jim's problem is, then, that of his unbridled romanticism. Price rightly thinks of *Lord Jim* as "a work that explores and profoundly questions romanticism" and that "takes the form of meditation on the romantic hero."⁹ Stein similarly diagnoses Jim's problem:

⁸Conrad, *Within in the Tides* vii-viii.

⁹Price, *Forms of Life* 244. The novel is for Price "Conrad's greatest" because: "Conrad remains both romantic and skeptic, each opposing the other, but neither quite controlled or limited. It is a book without balance or repose, and it seems to me Conrad's greatest because of the generosity with which each alternative is imagined" (257).

He is romantic--romantic. ... And that is very bad--very bad. ...
Very good, too. (216)

Jim can be good in the sense that he has the romantic sensibility, to take Robert Penn Warren's phrase, "to idealize himself and his actions into moral significance of some order."¹⁰ He can be bad in the sense that he can be a slave of excessive romanticism and blind egoism. The reader's difficulty lies in that there is no clear-cut line between the two.

In his Author's Note, Conrad tries to establish a character who is "one of us":

One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by--appealing--significant--under a cloud--perfectly silent. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was "one of us." (ix)

Jim may be "one of us" because his "fatal act speaks for all of us who have turned our backs on others or failed in one way or another."¹¹ He is "one of us" because he, like us, is not immune to "weakness that may lie

¹⁰Robert Penn Warren, introduction, *Nostromo*, by Conrad (New York: Random, 1951) xxii.

¹¹Ressler, *Joseph Conrad* 25.

hidden, watched or unwatched, prayed against or manfully scorned, repressed or maybe ignored more than half a lifetime" (43). Conrad is here suggesting that any criticism of Jim should also be directed against "us." Instead of condemning Jim's betrayal, one should seek in his betrayal something fundamental in human nature. As Howe observes, Conrad's phrase "one of us" should be enough to evoke for us "the whole tangle of fraternity and aloneness in human relationships."¹² Conrad's moral imagination asks the reader to give "all the sympathy" to Jim's predicament while and although a relentless inquiry into Jim's betrayal is inevitable. A search for the truth must be done "in the spirit of love for mankind."

Marlow's ceaseless search for truth tells something about Conrad's moral imagination. What Marlow primarily does is to find out "some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse" (50) for "a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been" (128). Yet Guerard finds Marlow rather problematic:

[O]n a first reading we are inclined to think Marlow's judgment too harsh (since we missed some of the evidence that led him to that judgment) ... on a second reading (because we are discovering

¹²Irving Howe, *Decline of the New* (New York: Harcourt, 1970) 299.

that evidence with a force of delayed impact) we may think Marlow's judgment too lenient.¹³

Even "on a first reading" Marlow, however, appears "lenient" not because he wants to distract the reader's attentive eyes but because his interest in Jim is primarily based on his humanistic sympathy. Marlow is not a "discriminating" critic or, as William York Tindall claims, a "cynical sentimentalist, obsessed with man's integrity."¹⁴ Instead, he is "an ally, a helper, an accomplice" (93). As Stewart rightly observes, "Marlow acknowledges something of Jim in himself, just as he had done of Kurtz [in "Heart of Darkness"]."¹⁵

One should bear in mind Marlow's affectionate feeling for Jim and therefore paraphrase or reinterpret what Marlow says about Jim. Affection "can easily miss fairness on the critical side."¹⁶ Marlow is never harsh on Jim's behavior even though he sometimes sounds rather severe towards Jim. This is his "weakness" as he acknowledges:

¹³Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 154.

¹⁴William York Tindall, *Forces in Modern British Literature* (New York: Vintage, 1956) 141.

¹⁵Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* 198.

¹⁶Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 182.

My weakness consists in not having a discriminating eye for the incidental--for the externals--no eye for the hod of the rag-picker or the fine linen of the next man. ... I have met so many men ... with a certain--certain--impact, let us say; like this fellow, for instance--and in each case all I could see was merely the human being. (94)

Marlow's lack of "a discriminating eye" should not be a problem, though, since what matters is not his judgment on any human being but his sincere attempt to understand human nature as well as his humanistic care for Jim's predicament, as if Jim's impasse were his own.

Employing Marlow as a useful device, Conrad's moral imagination makes the reader "see" Jim's betrayal in various perspectives. Stein has been regarded as a representative figure for Conrad. It is not Stein but Marlow, however, who truly reflects the author's moral imagination. Stein, of course, has a lot in common with his creator. Conrad's view of the universe as the "knitting machine," for example, is more or less reflected in Stein's pessimism: "man is come where he is not wanted, where there is no place for him" (208). However, one should never fail to notice that Marlow effectively counterbalances Stein's pessimism. In this respect, the critics (including Warren, Guerard and many others) seem to have made too much of Stein. They fail to see that his existential philosophy may go to the point of misanthropy which is no

doubt a betrayal of humanity. It is perhaps too much to label Stein a misanthropist, but his existential, almost nihilistic thinking is hardly commendable and cannot be in any way taken as the novel's moral center. As Paul Bruss argues, he "has become ... very solitary and--if not misanthropic--for the most part devoted to classifying the dead specimens of his collections."¹⁷ Marlow's presence is therefore a necessity, indeed, a moral necessity that keeps the novel from going into a moral bankruptcy. Unlike Stein for whom man is more a beetle than a butterfly, Marlow never prejudices Jim but rather admonishes the reader over and over that one cannot judge a person by the "normal" measure or "a fixed standard of conduct." Marlow sees no clear-cut line between the butterfly and the beetle.

When compared with, for instance, the remorseless figures like the German captain and two engineers who desert the ship without any hesitation and then shamelessly fabricate their version of the story, Jim appears to be decent, humane and civilized. The German captain sees the desertion of the ship as no more than a "little thing":

[Y]ou English always make--make a tam' fuss--for any little thing,
... Take away my certificate. Take it. I don't want the certificate.
A man like me don't want your verfluchte certificate. I shpit on it.

¹⁷Paul Bruss, *Conrad's Early Sea Fiction: The Novelist as Navigator* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1979) 114. See also 113-20.

(42)

The German captain of the *Patna* has no sense of his awesome responsibility. He is very much like Captain Robinson, "Holy-Terror Robinson," who immersed himself in the cannibalism and opium-smuggling without an ache of conscience (162). Ironically, it is the German captain, along with others, who initiates the desertion of the ship. He does not show a single moment of scruple when he escapes from the sinking ship. He does not understand why people make much ado about that "little thing" and why Captain Elliot, the Master Attendant, became furious with him and, according to Marlow's metaphor, "chewed him up" and "ejected him again" (39). The Master Attendant's fury is for the German captain merely a "Gottam fuss." It comes as no surprise that the captain disappears without attending the court inquiry.

The villainous and conscienceless captains such as the German Captain and Captain Robinson (who in turn becomes Chester's prey) are rare in the Conradian world. If a ship can be considered, to use Conrad's own words, "the moral symbol of our life"¹⁸ or a microcosm of the world in which we live, the captain of the ship assumes a supreme power and responsibility. The fate of the ship is solely dependent on the captain.

¹⁸Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 188.

There are numerous captains in Conrad's artistic world who do their job responsibly and courageously. The captains such as Allistoun (*The Nigger of the Narcissus*), MacWhirr ("Typhoon"), the anonymous captain ("The Secret Sharer"), and Peyrol (*The Rover*) remarkably illustrate in their own way the captain's awesome responsibility. None of them ever neglects his awesome duty as the head of the microcosmic world. The German Captain, however, breaks the sacred rules without any remorse or moral conflict.

The two engineers in the novel are no better than their captain. They perceive no moral degradation in their betrayal of the passengers. The Chief Engineer's madness does not come from the ache of his conscience but rather from his curious misanthropy. He says that the ship was "full of reptiles." The pilgrims are for him no more than "millions of pink toads." The sight of "millions of pink toads" is "worse than seeing a ship sink" (52). He cultivates the d.t.'s so conveniently that he does not have to attend the inquiry. The Second Engineer also finds his way to the hospital, "with his arm in splints, and quite light-headed." Like his captain, he disappears without attending the inquiry. (He later appears to haunt Jim who is working as a water-clerk.)

The conscienceless betrayers like the German captain and two engineers are, as Marlow perceives, "nobodies" and "no-account chaps" in the sense that they feel nothing no matter what they did to others and that their desertion is not accountable in terms of the seaman's ethical

code (46). To one's astonishment, they exult over the mistaken notion that the ship has sunk with its human cargo, and even exchange jokes when their criminal act is spoken of notoriously all around the port. They surely deserve the most severe punishment yet escape it by running away from the judicial process. Unlike them, Jim faces the court inquiry. There is courage in Jim's willingness to face it, as Marlow says:

I became positive in my mind that the inquiry was a severe punishment to that Jim, and that his facing it--practically of his own free will--was a redeeming feature in his abominable case.
(68)

Kenneth B. Newell echoes Marlow's words, as he says: "though the facts reviewed in court would seem to disprove his courage, his facing those facts would prove his courage."¹⁹

There is no doubt that if compared only with the German captain and two engineers, Jim would remain a more humanized, more appealing character. Jim's sense of superiority over the German captain and his followers is somewhat justifiable. He calls his co-betrayers "three dirty owls," and the German captain is for him "the incarnation of everything vile and base that lurks in the world" (21).

¹⁹Kenneth B. Newell, "The Yellow-Dog Incident in Conrad's *Lord Jim*," *Studies in the Novel* III.1 (Spring 1971): 32.

But one must be disturbed by Jim's inability to see his own flaws. It is not others but himself that he should be concerned with. He is unable to find the horror in his own heart. He does not want to acknowledge that he acted along with the "three dirty owls." There is something hollow in Jim's exalted superiority. He imagines himself as "a masterpiece" like a butterfly yet acts like a beetle. What disturbs one further is his evasive attitude about his "jump":

I had jumped ... It *seems*. (Italics added) (111)

Jim is unable to feel that "it is *he* who has done so."²⁰ He wants to make one believe that "he had not acted but had suffered to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him for the victim of their practical jokes" (108). He believes that the conspiratorial forces including sky, sea and men are responsible for his action. It is not he but something infernal that forced him to jump. He is morally blind at this point because he does not recognize that the blameable cause should be found in his heart rather than outside. He never reaches any understanding of horror and darkness within himself that Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness" almost courageously recognizes at the moment of death: "The horror! The

²⁰Johnson, *Conrad's Models of Mind* 14.

horror!"²¹ What Kurtz ultimately realizes is that "heart of darkness" is not outside but inside of himself. Jim does not see the horror in his romantic heart although his jump proved it. He is too egoistic not to add "It seems" to "I had jumped." He does not realize that even the most moral choice cannot always be anticipated or controlled. To assume "[r]esponsibility for the 'remote consequences' of even one's most insignificant act is a terrible burden," yet "one must [nevertheless] bear responsibility for the future consequences of one's present actions."²² Conrad's view of "Heart of Darkness" as a foil to *Lord Jim* is, then, justifiable.²³

Two helmsmen of the *Patna* make it more difficult to keep one's sympathy with Jim. The two Malays remained holding the wheel, thinking of nothing but their immediate duty as helmsmen. One of them even sensed that "some evil thing" befell the ship, but he received "no order" from the white men and therefore never thought of leaving the helm (98). The Malay helmsmen are to some extent similar to Captain MacWhirr in "Typhoon" who has "just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more."²⁴ What is more important for

²¹Conrad, *Youth and Two Other Stories* 149.

²²Lee M. Whitehead, "Conrad's 'Pessimism' Re-examined," *Conradiana* 2.3 (Spring 1969-70): 35.

²³Kirschner, *Conrad* 48.

²⁴Conrad, *Typhoon and Other Stories* 4.

the two Malays (as well as for Captain MacWhirr) is not an imagination like Jim's but their incorrigible fidelity to duty. The lack of imagination is a blessing in this case.

Perhaps more than anybody, the French lieutenant sharply points out what Jim has lost by his fatal jump from the *Patna*. To a certain extent, he sympathizes with Jim as he says: "The young man in question might have had the best dispositions." But he knows that, regardless of his "best dispositions," Jim lost "honor" irretrievably:

But the honour--the honour, monsieur! ... The honour ... that is real--that is! And what life may be worth ... when the honour is gone. (148)

The French lieutenant stayed on the deserted *Patna* for thirty hours while it was being towed to Ader. He stayed on the ship even though he knew that it might sink at any moment: "all the time of towing we had two quartermasters stationed with axes by the hawsers, to cut us clear of our tow in case [the *Patna* goes down]" (140). The danger and fears were real, yet he remained there with the passengers. He did what Jim wanted himself to do under the circumstances. "The French lieutenant's unconscious heroism is," Dorothy Van Ghent observes, "the heroism that Jim had made a conscious ideal; and his witness measures Jim's failure

by the painful difference of fact."²⁵ After a talk with the French lieutenant, Marlow feels it impossible to find any "shadow of excuse" for Jim's betrayal. The French lieutenant's dry and unimaginative testimony makes Marlow rather "hopeless."

Bob Stanton's heroism, again, makes any justification of Jim's desertion more difficult. He, like Jim, is the chief mate of the *Sephora* yet, unlike Jim, lives up to the seaman's code. He would not leave any one on board a sinking ship. While attempting to save a lady's maid Stanton gets drowned. He meets his death while doing what an officer is supposed to do under the circumstance. Compared with "Little Bob Stanton," it is extremely difficult to find any sympathy for the man who left eight hundred on board a dangerously damaged ship.

Captain Brierly, one of the assessors at the court inquiry, provides a different look at Jim's case. "Big Brierly" is unable to tolerate Jim's suffering which is being doubled by the judicial process. He even asks Marlow to send Jim away, offering two hundred rupees. Brierly is the man who can deeply think as to what he could have done had he been in Jim's situation. Luckily enough, Brierly never encountered such bad luck as Jim's. Marlow shares with Brierly a sympathetic feeling towards Jim and would like to "spare the mere detail of a formal execution" (152). While thinking of Jim's inescapable dilemma, Brierly really thinks of

²⁵Dorothy Van Ghent, "On *Lord Jim*," *Lord Jim: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds Sources Essays in Criticism*, ed. Thomas C. Moser (New York: Norton, 1968) 388.

himself. There is some truth when he indicts people for judging Jim too harshly and too superficially:

The worst of it is that all you fellows have no sense of dignity; you don't think enough of what you are supposed to be. (67)

Brierly's criticism should be taken seriously. Some people are too inconsiderate to think of themselves. For instance, "Schomberg, the keeper of the hotel where he [Jim] boarded, a hirsute Alsatian of manly bearing and an irrepressible retailer of all the scandalous gossip of the place, would ... impart an adorned version of the story to any guest who cared to imbibe knowledge along with the more costly liquors" (198). Schomberg is not interested in the truth or human suffering but in his business alone. Later in *Victory*, Schomberg goes a step further and actually ruins Heyst and Lena by his diabolic slander. Captain O'Brien is another example. He superficially judges the deserters and calls them "the skunks":

It's no laughing matter. It's a disgrace to human nature--that's what it is. I would despise being seen in the same room with one of those men. (193-4)

Even Jim's employer Egström declares, although unknowingly: "I

wouldn't care to have them here myself" (194). Some people, on the other hand, want to exploit Jim's disgrace ruthlessly. For example, Chester, one of the most malignant outlaws, wants to use Jim (who he thinks is "no good") for his unlawful work on a suspicious island by making him a "supreme boss over the coolies" (166, 167). Compared with these people's hostility and unsympathetic attitude towards Jim, Brierly's appears to be more humane and more dignified.

Captain Brierly's sympathetic identification with Jim, however, should not be an obstacle to confronting the fundamental issue: what does Brierly accomplish by committing suicide? Had he gone through a traumatic experience by observing Jim's court inquiry, he should have tried to compensate for it by softening his arrogant attitude and thereby acting properly. We are told that Brierly, like Jim, has been rather arrogant towards people. And his superiority used to "make you feel small" (59). While watching Jim's case, he feels that his experience relied on his personal luck rather than his own fidelity and courage. At the moment he arrives at a certain understanding of himself, he makes a decisive farewell to the world by cutting himself off from "the community of mankind." Like Martin Decoud in *Nostromo*, "Big Brierly" commits suicide because he lacks "a faith in himself and others." (Heyst in *Victory* commits suicide, but Conrad will modify the outcome.) Despite his humanitarian care for Jim and his keen self-knowledge, there is something hollow in his suicide. It is "a refusal to confront and grasp

the implications for human existence of Jim's fatal jump from *Patna*.²⁶
 The ending of his life is more of life-annihilation than of life-affirmation.
 He dies betraying life.

3

The Patusan part of *Lord Jim* lacks congruity in many ways with the Patna part and loses the moral intensity the latter has. It is more like romance or fairy tale than realistic presentation of Jim's psycho-moral drama. This leads Leavis to think of the novel as a minor work. The second part is, says Leavis, "the romance" that "has no inevitability" and does not "develop or enrich the central interest."²⁷ Leavis can hardly be refuted, since the second part is indeed like the world "in books" where Jim and Jewel live "like knight and maiden" (312). Conrad himself called it "the plague spot."²⁸ John D. Gordan, too, observes: "The book seems halved with a knife."²⁹

One should, however, be able to see that Patusan is not quite as

²⁶Suresh Raval, *The Art of Failure: Conrad's Fiction* (Boston: Allen, 1986) 48.

²⁷Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 190.

²⁸Edward Garnett, ed., *Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928) 171.

²⁹John D. Gordan, *Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist* (New York: Russell, 1963) 64.

antithetical to the outside world as it appears. In spite of the atmosphere of fantasy, the drama of human conflicts is as real as the outside world. The same sort of betrayers as the German Captain, the first and second engineers, and Chester are also present in Patusan. In this respect, Ian Watt hits the point: "Patusan constitutes a continuation rather than a new departure."³⁰ Furthermore, there seems to be no place else for Jim to start his life "with a clean slate" (185). In Patusan, he doesn't have to worry about the rumors concerning his desertion of the *Patna*. For the people of Patusan he is just another white man from "the world outside" or perhaps from nowhere. No one knows Jim's past but himself.

But Jim has more immediate problems at Patusan than his past. The people of Patusan have been severely oppressed by two wicked rulers. Sherif Ali "hung over Patusan like a hawk over a poultry-yard," "incited the tribes ... to rise" and "devastated the open country" (257). Rajah Allang, "a dirty, little, used-up old man with evil eyes and a weak mouth" (228), was notorious in his "robbery" trade policy: "his idea of trading was indistinguishable from the commonest forms of robbery" (257); he "did the extorting and the stealing, and ground down to the point of extinction the country-born Malays, who, utterly defenceless, had not even the resource of emigrating" (228). As the result of their cruelty

³⁰Ian P. Watt, "The Ending of *Lord Jim*," *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad*, ed. Ted Billy, 94. See also John Batchelor's *The Edwardian Novelists* 47. Batchelor thinks of the second part as "an aesthetic necessity."

and rapacity, "utter insecurity for life and property was the normal condition" (228). Jim shows his courage and determination to compensate for his stained past by liberating the people from the two wicked rulers. He thereby becomes venerated and trusted as if he were a deity. Order and security are fully restored to Patusan. The natives take "his word for anything and everything" (268). This makes him declare: "I have got back my confidence in myself" (333).

Perhaps Jim's rehabilitation can be compared with Hester Prynne's in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. His public disgrace stemming from his jump out of the *Patna* is to some extent similar to "the scarlet letter" which Hester Prynne wears on her bosom for her breach of a public code. Just as Hester lives a solitary life with her daughter Pearl on the outskirts of the town, Jim leads an alienated life since his "jump." Just as Hester devotes herself to works of mercy and slowly gains the respect of the townspeople, so Jim ceaselessly attempts to gain the respect of others.

Jim's rehabilitation, however, is not complete, though Marlow thinks that Jim "at last mastered his fate" (324). Marlow is mistaken here, as a result of his humanitarian and brotherly affection towards Jim. Jim is still preoccupied with his past. "The very thought of the world outside," Jim confesses, "is enough to give me a fright ... because I have not forgotten why I came here" (305). Also, he still needs "an ally, a helper, an accomplice" (93). He never breaks free from the outside

world. Therefore, he is, to take Malcolm Lowry's phrase, "living in a self-imposed exile, brooding ... over his lost honour, his secret, and imagining that a stigma would cling to him ... throughout his life."³¹

Moreover, he does not find the natives capable of understanding him:

All these people can never be made to understand what is going on in me. (306)

As Hunt Hawkins accurately points out, "All his actions are taken not in reference to Patusan, but to a European idea of honor. He is constantly imagining what Europeans would think of him. Unfortunately, Jim is never fully able to redeem his sense of his own trustworthiness because he does not regard the trust of the natives, upon which he is so dependent, as equivalent to European trust."³² Jim commits another act of betrayal by his distrust of others including his own lover. He is "unable to respect, even while he loves, the people of Patusan for the trust they show him."³³ The natives are for Jim "always objects, never subjects."³⁴

³¹Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (New York: Plume, 1971) 33.

³²Hunt Hawkins, "Conrad and the Psychology of Colonialism," *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (University: U of Alabama P, 1985) 78.

³³Price, *Forms of Life* 254.

³⁴Hawkins, "Conrad and the Psychology of Colonialism" 79. See also 77-80. Hawkins finds a colonialism in Jim's attitude toward the natives.

Jim's egocentric refusal to communicate might be considered the result of racial superiority. Ghent thinks of Jim's inability to kill Brown as "a lonely act of faith with the white men 'out there,' the men of Jim's race and traditions, the men upon the sea whose code he had once betrayed, the 'home' from which a single impulse of nerves had forever exiled him."³⁵ By acting according to the white men's code, Jim seems to show his superiority to the natives. It is needless to say that any kind of racism goes against humanity and therefore is a form of dangerous betrayal of humanity itself.

As Jocelyn Baines observes, Jim's "tragedy or misfortune is the consequence of isolation."³⁶ Jim's willful isolation even from his own lover makes his triumph appear somewhat uneasy and hollow. His mind "has no room for sympathetic regard for others' feelings."³⁷ By keeping everything dark from Jewel he makes her life a limbo, filled with constant anxieties and worries. Of course Jewel senses intuitively that something mysterious is haunting Jim:

There is something he can never forget. ... What is it? What is it?

... What is this thing? Is it alive?--is it dead? I hate it. It is cruel.

³⁵Ghent, "On *Lord Jim*" 381.

³⁶Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* (New York: McGraw, 1967) 441.

³⁷Price, *Forms of Life* 247.

Has it got a face and a voice--this calamity. Will he see it--will he hear it? In his sleep perhaps when he cannot see me--and then arise and go. ... Will it be a sign--a call? (314-5)

Even without ever being told, she miraculously penetrates into the heart of Jim's predicament and even prophesies that he would betray her at "a sign--a call." Marlow later confirms that Jim betrayed her "at the call of exalted egoism" (416).

Unlike Jim, Jewel appears to be selfless. At some point, she even "urge[s] Jim to leave her, and even to leave the country." It is Jim's peril that is "foremost in her thoughts" (311). Her family history makes her selflessness look more admirable and more agonizing. Jewel's mother was deserted by her white father. Her white grandfather also left her mother for his "own ends." Jim swears that he would never leave her, yet "other men had sworn the same thing" and nevertheless broke their promise. Despite Marlow's assurance that Jim would not leave her, she ultimately meets the same fate. Jim "goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (416). Marlow cannot possibly defend his "brother" when Jewel charges:

He has left me ... you always leave us--for your own ends ... Ah! you're hard, treacherous, without truth, without compassion. (348)

Jim's "exalted egoism" comes before Jewel's human love, and his death is therefore far from a victory.

4

Critical attention has been heavily focussed on the Gentleman Brown episode, yet there seems to be no critical consensus as to how Jim's final act can be assessed. For some, Jim's death exemplifies his triumph as a hero. Watt, for example, claims that "Jim does something which no other hero of a great twentieth-century novel has done: he dies for his honor."³⁸ Boyle similarly claims that Jim "gains immortality by his last unselfish act."³⁹ On the other hand, Tony Tanner thinks otherwise: "Conrad could not accept the beetle--Donkin's view of things [in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*]--and he renounced the fallible, if beautiful, butterfly-Jim conception of life."⁴⁰ Guerard also doubts "whether he is truly redeemed."⁴¹

³⁸Watt, "The Ending of *Lord Jim*" 100.

³⁹Boyle, *Symbol and Meaning* 80.

⁴⁰Tony Tanner, "Butterflies and Beetles--Conrad's Two Truths," *Lord Jim*, ed. Moser, 462.

⁴¹Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 129.

There should be a legitimate concern as to why even the novel's best critics could not agree upon Jim's final conduct. Their disagreement is paradoxically an agreement that there is no easy answer to the question. One cannot easily disagree with Watt who asserts that Jim attains "nobility," since Jim has to a certain extent a noble side: Jim's "inability to forget the *Patna* [incident]" illustrates that he is fundamentally a moral man, at least in his own sense.⁴² It would also be difficult to disagree with Ghent, as she argues that Jim's death has, unlike that of Oedipus, no "constructive social meaning" because "Jim's final act brings about (projectively) the destruction of the community."⁴³

Indeed, Jim's fatal encounter with Gentleman Brown reveals a lot of things about Jim's nature. Among Conrad's betrayers, Brown occupies one of the most prominent places. Even before he breaks the promise that he will retreat without doing any harm, it is evident that his life has been virtually embedded in all kinds of betrayals. He is a man of "murder and rapine" (370), used to "kidnap natives" around Polynesia and rob "some lonely white trader to the very pajamas" (352).

As Marlow observes, "what distinguished him from his contemporary brother ruffians ... was the arrogant temper of his misdeeds and a vehement scorn for mankind at large and for his victims in

⁴²Watt, "The Ending of *Lord Jim*" 86.

⁴³Ghent, "On *Lord Jim*" 379.

particular" (352). Interestingly enough, Brown calls "himself proudly the Scourge of God" (370) just as Tamburlaine in Christopher Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine the Great* does.⁴⁴ He dislikes Jim "at first sight" because Jim is "not the man he expected to see." He rather wanted a scoundrel like himself whom he could easily manipulate and exploit. Jim does "not look like a man who would be willing to give anything for assistance." Even Jim's outlook is enough to make him conscious of his own beetle-like appearance. Jim is dressed in white from head to foot. "The very neatness of Jim's clothes" is sufficient enough to exasperate Brown and arouse the impulsive desire of motiveless revenge (380).

Brown is the man, as Marlow observes, who has "a satanic gift of finding out the best and the weakest spot in his victims" (385). Jim is first shaken by Brown's ingenious words: "Let us agree that we are both dead men, and let us talk on that basis, as equals. We are all equal before death" (381). Brown sees the effect of his language and then digs out Jim's past through his "satanic gift":

I came here for food. D'ye hear?--food to fill our bellies. And

⁴⁴See Cedric Watts's "Reflections on *Victory*" *Conradiana*, xv.1 (1983): 74-5. Watts rightly compares Brown with Marlowe's Tamburlaine. Indeed, Brown's "the Scourge of God" is actually Tamburlaine's phrase in Christopher Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine the Great*. Tamburlaine boasts that he is the "Scourge of God": "There is a God, full of revenging wrath,/ From whom the thunder and the lightning breaks,/ Whose scourge I am, and him will I obey" (Part II, V.181-3). As such Brown and Tamburlaine have a lot in common. They are selfish and think of nothing but themselves; they are warlike and destructive, and negate and destroy the civilized values; they exult over their power even while they are dying.

what did *you* come for? What did you ask for when you came here? (382)

Brown intuitively senses Jim's "soft spot": the latter came to Patusan to seek "a clean slate" with which he can rehabilitate his past. Jim gets further unnerved by Brown's next words:

There are my men in the same boat--and, by God, I am not the sort to *jump out* of trouble and leave them in a d--d lurch. (Italics added) (382-3)

Brown penetrates miraculously into the heart of Jim's obsession with his jump from the *Patna*. "I am here," Brown continues cunningly and with a seeming honesty, "because I was afraid once in my life. Want to know what of? Of a prison. That scares me, and you may know it--if it's any good to you. I won't ask you what scared you into this infernal hole, where you seem to have found pretty pickings" (383).⁴⁵

Brown's rhetoric is too forceful for Jim to withstand. Jim finally gives in to Brown's demand and promises him "a clear road or else a clear fight" (388). Jim makes a fatal mistake as he also acquiesces to

⁴⁵Heimer thinks that Brown "has the courage Jim lacks in his early career and he lives a life of reality rather than one of illusion." Yet it is difficult to think that Brown has a courage. If his is a courage, it is no more than a sham. Brown is merely exploiting Jim through his "satanic gift." See "Betrayal, Guilt, and Attempted Redemption in *Lord Jim*," *Ball State University Forum* (1968): 31.

Brown's tenacious will not to give up his weapons. Jim allows virtually everything that Brown wants for himself and his gang. Brown's "sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts" is simply too much for Jim (387). He is literally overpowered by Brown's "satanic gift" of penetration.

One may argue somewhat convincingly that Jim's inability to kill Brown may illustrate a noble side of his personality because, as Watt speculates, "Jim may even have identified with Brown to the extent that he thought that, like himself, Brown ought to be given another chance."⁴⁶ Heimer similarly argues that Jim "is lenient with Brown because he wants leniency for himself."⁴⁷ Batchelor, too, observes: "Jim is Christ-like, forgiving Brown, refraining from the use of power, unapproachable."⁴⁸ Such observations are not without truth. Jim may be practicing his father's moral lesson that he should not "judge men harshly or hastily" (341). It is possible to think that by not judging Brown harshly Jim may be framing "a message to the impeccable world" (339) in which he was judged "harshly and hastily." One may even try to vindicate Jim by saying that he could not possibly foresee Brown's betrayal.

⁴⁶Watt, "The Ending of *Lord Jim*" 88.

⁴⁷Heimer, "Betrayal, Guilt, and Attempted Redemption in *Lord Jim*" 42.

⁴⁸Batchelor, *The Edwardian Novelists* 54.

Whatever chivalry he showed Brown, Jim, however, should have thought of his people's safety before he reached any decision. We are not shown that he is wrestling with any idea of the possible calamity to the natives while letting Brown's gang go with their guns. Jim later says that he has "no thought but for the people's good" (389), yet his assertion sounds empty or at least naive. In this respect, Cornelius hits the point: "He is no more than a little child here" (327). Marlow's earlier comment on Jim's love also has a point: "he seemed to love the land and the people with a sort of fierce egoism, with a contemptuous tenderness" (248).

Brown is the man who always wants to "trample all the earth under his feet" (384). His misanthropy has no space for human sympathy or any human feelings other than motiveless anger and spite. Jim gives him a golden chance to exert his satanic power over the innocent people of Patusan. Ironically enough, the silver ring, an emblem of "eternal friendship," is sent to make sure that Brown and his gang be allowed to pass without any harm. Assured of his safety, Brown gratuitously massacres Dain Warris, the only son of Doramin, and his company. The magic of trust, represented by the silver ring, is broken.

Stein gave Jim the silver ring, which was initially given to him by Doramin, the chief of the second power in Patusan, for saving "that chap's life on some occasion" (234). The emblem of trust and "eternal friendship" once opened for Jim "the door of fame, love, and success"

(415). By being unfaithful to the people, Jim now destroys what the silver ring signifies. To make the destruction more complete, Doramin shoots Jim with "the flintlock pistols" which were a gift from his "war-comrade," Stein.

Cornelius, Jewel's stepfather, contributes to Jim's downfall as much as Brown. He is described as "a repulsive beetle" which is the reminder of Stein's collection of ugly and malevolent beetles. Cornelius embodies the betrayal of humanity as much as Brown. His betrayal is appropriately exemplified in his cruelty towards Jewel and his sinister hostility against Jim. Before Jim came to Patusan Cornelius enjoyed the supreme power not only as Stein's agent but as Jewel's stepfather. He would steal money out of the business transactions and used to torture Jewel by abusing her late mother. Because Jim's presence makes him utterly impotent, Cornelius tries everything to get rid of him. He and Sherif Ali conspire to kill Jim, and he disgustingly offers Jim protection for eighty dollars (310-1). Had Jewel not watched her lover every night, Jim would not have survived Cornelius's vicious plot. It is not Jim's courage but Jewel's vigilance alone that saves him from the deadly fang of Cornelius. After all, Cornelius destroys Jim's reputation by informing Brown that there is "another way [unknown and hidden to outsiders] to get out of the river" (397).

It is surprising, though, to see that Cornelius shows a keen insight into Jim's character:

He is a fool. A little child. He came here and robbed me ... and he made all the people believe him. But if something happened that they did not believe him any more, where would he be? (397)

This is precisely what happens to Jim after Brown's revenge makes him appear unfaithful to the people. Cornelius even urges Brown to kill Jim: "all you have to do is to kill him and then you are king here" (368). He keenly notes that since Jim is a myth for the people, whoever kills him would create another myth for himself and become the virtual ruler without being challenged.

Cornelius gets killed by Tamb' Itam, Jim's servant who is faithful to his white lord till the end. To one's relief, at least one betrayer of Tuan Jim gets punished, which does not happen often in the Conradian universe. Unlike the beetle-like Cornelius, Brown meets a natural death long after his departure from Patusan, still "with malicious exultation at the bare thought of Jim" (344). As Conrad shows over and over, a Brown-like man persists. Conrad's moral imagination chooses not to provide an arbitrary or unrealistic punishment or justice. The "artist in him [Conrad]," as Edward Crankshaw notes, "completely overwhelms the preacher."⁴⁹

⁴⁹Edward Crankshaw, *Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel* (New York: Russell, 1963) 50.

Jewel and Tamb' Itam expect Jim to fight against Doramin, but Jim finds no excuse for fighting:

There is nothing to fight for ... nothing is lost. ... There is no escape. (412)

Jewel reminds Jim of his "unasked" promise: "Do you remember you said you would never leave me? Why? I asked you for no promise. You promised unasked--remember" (412). Yet Jim is unmoved by her agonizing protest. "Enough, poor girl, I should not be worth having," says Jim instead (412). It seems that Jim finally reaches some understanding of himself. He knows he is not "worth having" because he has betrayed something fundamental and, therefore, will not be trusted any more. He also recognizes that there is no more exit for him, since he came to Patusan in order to escape from "the world outside."

His self-knowledge, however, is a limited one. There is no thoughtful consideration of Jewel's future without him. What is important for him is not Jewel's wretched future without his love and protection but his "exalted egoism." Jim says "in a last flicker of superb egoism": "Nothing can touch me" (413). Jewel and the natives both are excluded from his egocentric mind. It is true that Jim has no choice left but to face Doramin. He may be facing an existential "either/or." But what matters is not an impossibility of the choice but the lack of concern for

others. In this respect, he commits another betrayal and perhaps reveals "an inhuman coldness."⁵⁰

But no one would deny that Jim's decision to go to Doramin is not without some nobility and courage. Jim knows that going to Dain Warris's father means his own death, yet goes "ready and unarmed." According to Najder, Jim's final act is honorable: "the only alternative open to him was to fight--and kill more innocent people. Here the principle of honor, of taking full responsibility for one's word, coincides with simple concern for preserving human lives."⁵¹ Indeed, Jim dies willfully, sending "right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance." Conrad's moral imagination (through Marlow) asks the reader: "Is he satisfied--quite, now I wonder?" (416). The question is difficult to answer. One cannot easily dismiss Jim's final conduct as a mere form of betrayal or embrace Jim's "pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" without being disturbed. While being faithful to his "ideal of conduct" Jim becomes unfaithful to Jewel and, as Gillon says, "ruins the lives of the survivors and wipes out with one stroke the reputation he has earned by his *faithful* devotion and courage."⁵² Conrad

⁵⁰Jazques Berthoud, *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase* (London: Cambridge UP, 1978) 93.

⁵¹Najder, "Conrad and the Idea of Honor," *Joseph Conrad: Theory and World Fiction*, ed. Wolodymyr T. Zyla and Wendell M. Aycock (Lubbock: Texas Tech P, 1974) 111.

⁵²Gillon, *Joseph Conrad* 97.

seems to show his ambivalence towards Jim by neither denouncing outspokenly Jim's egoism nor embracing it. Perhaps he is skeptical of both. The reader should come up with his own judgment, always wondering whether his is the right answer.

5

Conrad chooses not to give any explicit moral lesson to the reader but rather invites the reader to find it himself. Ressler sees that "the working out of Jim's fate reflects more an artistic limitation than a statement of ambiguity as a novelistic and philosophical idea."⁵³ The limitation, however, is not Conrad's but Jim's. Douglas Hewitt, too, seems to find fault with the novel's "uncertainty": "The uncertainty which remains even at the end of the book as to what judgment we should pass on Jim and the passages of imprecise rhetoric are, I believe, an indication that his feelings are too deeply and too personally involved for him to stand above the bewilderment in which he places Marlow."⁵⁴ Ressler and Hewitt both, however, fail to take into account that explicitness was for Conrad an enemy of art, as Conrad makes it clear in his letter to Richard

⁵³Ressler, *Joseph Conrad* 46.

⁵⁴Douglas Hewitt, *Conrad: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Bowes, 1952) 39. Unlike Hewitt's contention, Conrad believed otherwise: "before all one must divest oneself of every particle of respect for one's character." See Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 1: 301.

Curle:

Explicitness ... is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion.⁵⁵

Conrad's moral imagination does not opt to flatter the reader by giving a decisive answer. He rather chooses to trouble the reader's mind by presenting a modern "one of us" hero with whom we have a lot of affinity. It is not merely Jim but ourselves that we should be ultimately concerned with. Like Jim, we have our own "heart of darkness" inside us and, when confronted with the same difficulty as Jim's, might think that we are betrayed by "a villainy of circumstances" or "the Dark Powers" (121) rather than assuming our ultimate responsibility.

Jim's poignant question--"What would you have done?" (92)--cannot be superficially dismissed. One early reviewer put it wonderfully: "Let the man who is without fear cast the first stone. For such a man, if he exist, the story of Lord Jim will have, perchance, neither fascination nor moral lesson."⁵⁶ One may also remind himself of Christ's words: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her

⁵⁵Richard Curle, ed., *Conrad to a Friend: 150 Selected Letters from Joseph Conrad to Richard Curle* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1928) 113.

⁵⁶Norman Sherry, ed., *Conrad: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 127. The review appeared in *Critic*, May 1901. Although brief, the review contains a fine criticism on the novel.

[Magdalen]."⁵⁷ Edmund Burke, too, warned against the hasty judgment: "The lines of morality are not like the ideal lines of mathematics. They are broad and deep as well as long. They admit of exceptions; they demand modifications."⁵⁸ Ultimately, one must agree with Batchelor as he pinpoints the core of the novel:

Marlow acknowledges that he would have jumped from the *Patna*, and I know that I, too, would have jumped. Conrad's novel enables each of us to have that knowledge experientially, to participate in Jim's rage with his own folly, to blush with him as he becomes aware of the ludicrous and shamed figure that he cuts in Singapore, to choke back the tears with him as he receives the punishment that he knows he is too sensitive to bear. And having put us through those experiences the novel then persuades us that we do not know the extent of our own inner resources.⁵⁹

The novel's vision is moral, almost faithfully moral. Then, one may still wonder why the word "nothing" is repeated so frequently in the novel. Marlow, for instance, says: "I affirm nothing" (339). Jim also says

⁵⁷King James Bible, John 8.7.

⁵⁸Louis I. Bredvold and Ralph G. Ross, ed., *The Philosophy of Edmund Burke: A Selection from His Speeches and Writings* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1960: 41.

⁵⁹Batchelor, *Lord Jim* (London: Unwin, 1988) 210.

that he has "nothing" to send to his family or the world. There "shall be no message" to deliver, says Marlow. Despite the repetition of "nothing," one should be able to see, however, that Marlow's view of life or the novel's overall vision never becomes either nihilistic or totally existential. Furthermore, there *is* "a message" for the reader as Marlow tells his audience:

[T]here shall be no message, *unless such as each of us can interpret for himself from the language of facts.* (Italics added)
(340)

Even Marlow's knowledge of Jim is not an ultimate truth, as he says: "I wanted to know--and to this day I don't know, I can only guess" (79). Conrad's moral imagination asks us to "interpret" Jim's action and make an individual judgment that would in turn become a "message"; by doing so one may advance "nearer to absolute Truth, which, like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half-merged, in the silent waters of mystery" (216).

Chapter III

Nostromo

The essence of moral energy is to survey the whole field.
Henry James

*Let observation with extensive View,
Survey Mankind, from China to Peru;
Remark each anxious Toil, each eager Strife,
And watch the busy Scenes of crouded Life.*
Samuel Johnson

I

Nostromo (1904), "one of the great novels of the language,"¹ or "one of the few mastering visions of our historical moment and our human lot,"² shows Conrad's different approach to the theme of betrayal. In the previous novel Jim's jump from the *Patna* is almost always a focal point so that virtually every one (or incident) is a sort of commentary on it. *Nostromo*, however, has no central character comparable to Jim. It is "the only novel in which Conrad attempted to deal simultaneously with a plurality of heroes."³ In this respect, the title *Nostromo* is somewhat

¹Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 190.

²Warren, introduction xxxix.

³Stephen K. Land, *Paradox and Polarity in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984) 141.

misleading because it may lead us to believe that the novel's central concern is about Nostromo. "On the whole," as Leavis says, "we see the characters from the outside."⁴ Edward Garnett, too, observes: Conrad "has a special sense for *the psychology of scene*, by which the human drama brought before us is seen in its just relation to the whole enveloping drama of Nature around, forming both the immediate environment and the distant background."⁵

The real hero of the book is the silver that the San Tomé mine produces, as Conrad makes the point in a letter to Ernst Bendz:

Nostromo has never been intended for the hero of the Tale of the Seaboard. Silver is the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale.⁶

The silver surely plays a very prominent role in the turbulent Costaguana. It has a lot to do with the political turbulence of Costaguana. Silver makes the whole society its victim. Almost every one becomes its victim in one way or another. To be more precise, silver forces almost every

⁴Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 201.

⁵Sherry, ed., *Conrad* 175. Garnett's review, titled "Mr. Conrad's Art," appeared in *Speaker*, November 12, 1904. Garnett, however, does not give a primal importance to the San Tomé silver mine. But his phrase is nevertheless useful, since the mine should be seen as a part of the novel's primary landscape. Garnett thinks of Conrad's method as "poetic realism" (177).

⁶Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 2: 296.

one to betray something. Silver, for example, becomes Charles Gould's "mistress." Even the "incorruptible" Nostromo is seduced by it.

The San Tomé mine is compared to a "paradise of snakes."⁷ Claire Rosenfield notes: "This 'paradise of snakes' is a prophecy of the future, of the constant threat of corruption over the Conradian universe, of the evil influence of the traditional in the political affairs of the area."⁸ The mine's history testifies to its ruthless and inhuman influence on the turbulent Costaguana:

Worked in the early days mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves, its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones. Whole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation.
(52)

Countless Indians' "corpses were thrown into its maw" (52). The lawless government offered "human bones" to their deity. The "religion of silver and iron" (71) required no less than ruthless human sacrifices.

The destructive power of the silver, however, should not in any way diminish the responsibility of the people. The destruction involves a reciprocal interaction between the silver and the people. They do not

⁷Conrad, *Nostromo* (New York: Doubleday, 1926) 105. Subsequent references are to this Doubleday edition and pagination is given parenthetically within the text.

⁸Claire Rosenfield, *Paradise of Snakes: An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's Political Novels* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967) 51.

know that they are trading their soul and humanity for "the religion of silver and iron." The myth of community is "replaced by the treasure which forms a new myth of a capitalist society."⁹ The San Tomé silver mine is, as Emilia Gould notes, "more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and more autocratic than the worst government ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness" (521). Dr. Monygham, too, observes:

There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. (511)

Warren, however, thinks differently:

There has been a civil war, but the forces of "progress"--i.e., the San Tomé mine and the capitalistic order--have won. And we must admit that the society at the end of the book is preferable to that

⁹Rosenfield, *Paradise of Snakes* 78.

at the beginning.¹⁰

Warren seems to suggest that the mine has made the "progress" possible. He ignores the likelihood of another civil war. The skeptical views of Emilia Gould and Dr. Monygham seem to have more truth in them. Instead of peace and prosperity, "the promise of new violence is inherent in the dialectic of material interests."¹¹ The further political turmoil is strongly suggested at the end of the novel. Leavis notes:

The ironical end of the book shows us a Sulaco in which order and ideal have triumphed, Progress forges ahead, and the all-powerful Concession has become the materialism for idealists and defenders of the spirit.¹²

Howe, too, observes:

[T]he civil war brings capitalism and capitalism will bring civil war, progress *has* come out of chaos but it is the kind of progress

¹⁰Warren, introduction xxix. Warren's interpretation does not have to be "a final word," as he indicates admirably and quite modestly: "[T]here is not, and should not be, an ultimate 'reading,' a final word and orthodoxy of interpretation. In so far as a work is vital, there will continually be a development, and extrapolation of significance" (xxxvi).

¹¹Price, *Forms of Life* 265.

¹²Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 191.

that is likely to end in chaos.¹³

If there has been a "progress" it is an ironical one. The fight between capitalists and Marxists is imminent. Father Corbelàn and others are already thinking that the Sulaco revolution should be "annexed" to the rest of Costaguana. They, as Dr. Monygham says, "are conspiring for the invasion of Costaguana" (511). "In its absurd rhythm of exploitation and misrule, of revolution and counterrevolution," Guerard has noted, "Costaguana may evoke almost any South or Central American republic; its trials are as contemporary as yesterday's *coup d'état* in Honduras or Haiti or the Guatemalan intervention of a few years ago."¹⁴

2

As Karl observes, "the nature of each character--no matter what his position--is defined in terms of his reaction to the mine."¹⁵ Charles Gould is of course no exception. He rather occupies the most prominent

¹³Howe, *Politics* 108.

¹⁴Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 178. Conrad's letter to Cunningham Graham vindicates Guerard's point: "Costaguana is meant for a [South American] state in general." See *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunningham Graham*, ed. Watts, 157. In his introduction, Watts suggests that "Conrad had Colombia chiefly in mind" (41).

¹⁵Karl, *A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad* (New York: Farr, 1969) 156.

place in the novel not merely because he is the owner of the mine but also because his idealistic view of material interests more or less initiates "the religion of silver and iron." He "allows the poison of the silver to drain into the already tainted whirlpool of political life in Costaguana and so brings evil upon himself as well as the rest of the principal characters."¹⁶

Charles Gould begins his infatuation with the mine against his father's wish. The lawless government forced his father, "one of the most wealthy merchants of Costaguana," to lend a great sum of money for loans. And then the government offered Mr. Gould the San Tomé mine for repayment and asked "the payment of five years' royalties." The government's "robbery under the forms of legality and business" (56) ruined Mr. Gould, for the mine was worthless at that time. As Charles Gould recognizes, the mine "has killed" his father (61). Because of his bitter experience with the mine, Mr. Gould "implored his son never to return to Costaguana, never to claim any part of his inheritance there, because it was tainted by the infamous Concession; never to touch it, never to approach it" (57).

Mr. Gould's warning against the danger of the mine leaves little impact on his son. Charles Gould romanticizes and idealizes the silver mine. It is notable that almost from the beginning Charles Gould's

¹⁶Paul L. Wiley, *Conrad's Measure of Man* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1954) 98.

infatuation with the San Tomé silver mine is tainted with disobedience (or betrayal).

Of course Charles Gould does not get involved in the mine without his reasoning. For his father "the mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster," but for him "its working must be made a serious and moral success" (66). He is almost sincere in his strong belief that "material interests" will bring back civilization to Costaguana:

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope. (84)

He understands that the nation's economy is sometimes a decisive factor for determining its fate. One thing he does not understand at this point is, though, that good economy alone cannot possibly solve the complicated problems of human society. It never crosses his mind that his "weapon of wealth" is "double-edged with the cupidity and misery of mankind,

steeped in all the vices of self-indulgence as in a concoction of poisonous roots, tainting the very cause for which it is drawn, always ready to turn awkwardly in the hand" (365).

The narrator observes that Charles Gould's idealism has something dangerous in it:

A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice; for *may he not bring the heaven down pitilessly upon a loved head?* (Italics added) (379)

He will do anything for the sake of his "fixed idea." He is, to use Baines's phrase, "a monomaniac who can only think of the mine as identified with himself."¹⁷ Even his father is betrayed under the illusion that if he can develop the mine successfully it will be a "way of atonement." The mine is for him the symbolic justice and stability. As Decoud wryly notes, Charles Gould idealizes "every simple feeling, desire, or achievement" and "could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale" (215).

His destructive relationship with Mr. Holroyd, an American financier, is also "clothed in the fair robes of an idea" (239). As long as

¹⁷Baines, *Joseph Conrad* 309.

a secure financial support is maintained, he does not care how Holroyd perceives Costaguana and how Holroyd's "pure form of Christianity" and his "insatiable imagination of conquest" will affect his country afterwards (76). Holroyd is the man who thinks that money can provide anything. Money will bring "industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's Sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole." It will also let him "run the world's business whether the world likes it or not" (77). Holroyd ultimately intends to "run" Costaguana by "running" Charles Gould. As Gillon notes, "Holroyd's credo is not different in essence from that enunciated in words or practice by today's giant corporations."¹⁸

The relationship between Charles Gould and Holroyd is based on a mutual need: the former wants money and the latter wants to export his imperialistic capitalism. Holroyd will go along with Gould "as long as the thing runs straight" (79). Otherwise, he will discard Gould without remorse: "But you may rest assured that in a given case we shall know how to drop you in time" (82).¹⁹ It is a chilling business relationship.

Charles Gould's invitation of foreign investments no doubt complicates the political situation. Like Gould's mine, the Ribierist government receives the loan from outside and is therefore totally

¹⁸Gillon, *Joseph Conrad* 110.

¹⁹See Conrad's *The Secret Agent* 28. Vladimir tells Verloc more or less the same thing: "When you cease to be useful you shall cease to be employed. ... You shall be chucked."

dependent upon the foreign investments. Holroyd's deep involvement in the affair of the San Tomé mine provides a convenient excuse for General Montero (the Minister of War) to start a revolution. Furthermore, Sir John, a British investor, is primarily interested in "systematic colonization of the Occidental Province" by accepting to construct "the National Central Railway" (117). However treacherous and selfish in its nature, Montero's appeal to the people's shallow patriotism works. Another civil war is inevitable.

Gould's slavish devotion to the silver mine causes a "subtle conjugal infidelity through which his wife was no longer the sole mistress of his thoughts" (365). Emilia is keenly aware of what she has lost:

[L]ove was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a deep grief lived through. There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the *moral degradation* of the idea. (italics added)

(521)

She knows that her husband's material success is beset with "the moral degradation" and that humanity is sacrificed and betrayed while he worships "the religion of silver." Charles Gould is too blind to see "the

moral degradation" in his faith in materialism because he has "something of an adventurer's easy morality which takes count of personal risk in the ethical appraisal of his action" (365). The mine is "possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds" (522). It is perhaps no accident that he is not blessed with his successor. Charles Gould would be the last of the Costaguana Goulds.²⁰ Edward Said admirably sums up Gould's betrayal of humanity:

Gould dies in the mine's service but is never reborn out of it. Rather than ennobling him, it debases him, and he "lives" on a purely mechanical level as a dehumanized organizer, the archforeman of an endless mechanical process. There is something of the same depressing effect of Gould's activity in Lawrence's description of Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*, who totally organizes his family's coal mine into what becomes, for Lawrence, a monument to death-in-life.²¹

Gould's soul as such simply "ceases to exist."

²⁰See Heimer's "Betrayal, Confession, Attempted Redemption, and Punishment in *Nostromo*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 8 (1966-7): 565. Heimer thinks of Gould's childlessness as a punishment.

²¹Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic, 1975) 116.

The theme of betrayal is more overtly treated in Nostromo's case than in Gould's. Interestingly enough, Nostromo often says that he has been "betrayed." He even dies, saying,

I die betrayed--betrayed--betrayed. (559)

But he does not say by whom or by what.

Nostromo is introduced with the magnificent phrases such as "a man absolutely above reproach," "the terror of all the thieves in the town" (13), "a perfectly incorruptible fellow" (127), etc. What he only cares about is a good reputation, as he says: "A good name is a treasure" (257). In his desire "to be well spoken of," Nostromo rescues the President-Dictator Ribiera from the mob, becomes the "terror" to the thieves, and resists the monetary temptations. He does not think of himself but others, and "is content to feel himself a power--within the People" (xii). He is "a Man of the People" (xiii).

It is Dr. Monygham alone who refuses to accept Nostromo's public reputation at face value: "it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better than he is able to think of himself" (44-5). Dr. Monygham's experience tells him that man's appearance may be often misleading and even deceptive.

Dr. Monygham's skepticism about Nostromo is legitimate, for Nostromo's public reputation is maintained at the cost of his "parents," particularly his "mother." Giorgio and Teresa Viola have been like Nostromo's parents on whose advice he deserted his ship to seek the fortune in Costaguana. He indeed calls Giorgio Viola "padrone" (126) and Mrs. Viola "mother" (256). He nevertheless disregards his mother's request that he stay home and protect the family from the roaring mob. Nostromo neglects his family to "be well spoken of." For the same reason Nostromo even refuses to execute the dying mother's last wish to "fetch a priest" for her (255-6). He drives the dying woman into despair by refusing to bring a priest. The "man for whom the value of life seems to consist in personal prestige" does not know that humanity should precede "personal prestige." Teresa Viola's charge against Nostromo is therefore justifiable: "he thinks of nobody but himself" (20). It is a bitter irony that "a Man of the People" turns out to be egocentric and inhuman. The nature of Nostromo has something in it like that of Charles Gould: the former contradicts and betrays his "mother," and the latter his father.

Surprisingly, Nostromo becomes "nervously resentful" when he is given a mission to save the silver. He becomes "scornfully exasperated" by the deadly nature of the trust put, as a matter of course, into his hands." It is more surprising to see that he entertains the idea that "if daylight caught them near the Sulaco shore through want of wind, it would be possible to sweep the lighter behind the cliff at the high end of

the Great Isabel, where she would lie concealed" (263). Nostromo's inner nature comes out to the surface. Unlike people's assessment of Nostromo as "incorruptible" or "invaluable," a "heart of darkness" is revealed at such a desperate and precarious moment. Rather than esteeming the absolute trust given by the people, Nostromo takes his mission as "a deadly disease" (264).

As Decoud indicates, the mission is merely "a political move." The silver has to be taken away from Sulaco, and Nostromo and Decoud are simply chosen for the work. While Decoud accepts the fact as it is, Nostromo rather resents it and at the same time indulges himself in bravado and bluster: "Well, I am going to make it the most famous and desperate affair of my life" (265).

The "heart of darkness" in Nostromo's nature is further revealed in his attitude toward Hirsch, a hide merchant, whose extreme fear induced him to slip into the lighter. Nostromo would not hesitate to "pull a bullet through his head." Hirsch is saved only by the compassionate Decoud who gives "him water to drink ... holding up the can to his lip as though he were [his] brother" (284). Needless to say, Nostromo would have killed even Decoud if necessary.

Nostromo has a lot to do with Decoud's death. Despite his promise that he will come back "in a night or two," Nostromo shows up too late to save Decoud. It seems that saving Decoud's life is never a priority for Nostromo. He even chooses not to tell anyone because he can trust no

one. Regardless of what he does to save Sulaco from Montero's brutal destruction, he is no doubt responsible for Decoud's suicide. Even on his death-bed, he is unable to admit his responsibility for Decoud's death. When Emilia Gould asks: "What became of Don Martin on that night, Nostromo?" he answers shamelessly: "Who knows? I wondered what would become of me" (559). His answer sounds more like, "Who cares?"

It is interesting to see that Nostromo accuses the rich of ruthlessly exploiting the poor:

You fine people are all alike. All dangerous. All betrayers of the poor who are your dogs. ... I say that you do not care for those that serve. ... I find myself like one of these curs that bark outside the walls--without a kennel or a dry bone for my teeth. (454)

Unlike his claim, it is his vanity and folly that betrayed him. He has nobody to blame but himself. Moreover, Emilia Gould rewards him by buying a schooner for him. Charles Gould also asks Nostromo what he could do for him, and Nostromo refuses to take anything, saying dishonestly and hypocritically:

My name is known from one end of Sulaco to the other. What more can you do for me? (489)

Nobody knows yet that his "good name" is hopelessly stained with duplicity, lies, theft, and betrayals.

As the narrator aptly comments, "A transgression, a crime entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever" (523). A "transgression" is the germ of another transgression. Nostromo's theft of the silver ingots begets his infidelity to his betrothed Linda. He asks "old Giorgio" to allow him to marry Linda even though he loves Giselle. His excuse is of course Teresa Viola's almost lifelong wish that he and Linda get married. As the narrator notes, "His courage, his magnificence, his leisure, his work, everything was as before, only everything was a sham" (523-4). Linda's consequent suffering is not taken into account at all.

The stereotyped expression of love by Nostromo is more like a parody of a medieval romance or of the Petrarchan sonnet in which heroes are typically using the clichés of love language. Nostromo, for instance, tells Giselle: "Your hair like gold, and your eyes like violets, and your lips like the rose; your round arms, your white throat" (535). He even calls her his "star" and his "little flower" (538). What is more disturbing and more ironic is that he never tells Giselle where the silver is buried. Despite his flattering expressions of love, he does not trust Giselle. Nostromo, in fact, loves "neither her nor her sister" (552). The silver, an inhuman object, is more important than a human lover. Emilia Gould tells the truth as she comforts Giselle who is crying over

Nostromo's death:

Console yourself, child. Very soon he would have forgotten you for his treasure. (561)

Emilia Gould's wisdom comes from her own heartbreaking experience: "I have been loved, too." In this respect Nostromo follows in Charles Gould's footsteps.

Nostromo dies thinking that he has been betrayed by the rich. He says that he "kept the treasure for purposes of revenge" (541). Considering his calculating disposal of the silver bars, it is hard to accept his accusation of the "fine people." He himself betrays others by acting against their complete trust. All members of Viola family suffer heavily from Nostromo's breach of trust, and Decoud even dies from his indiscretion. In other words, Nostromo dies betrayed, first, by the silver and, second, by himself.

Unlike Gould and Nostromo, Dr. Monygham does not betray humanity by becoming the prisoner of the silver. His past experience makes him wise so that he puts "no spiritual values into [his] desires, or

[his] opinions, or [his] actions" (318). Under the severe pressure of the ruthless Guzman Bento, he confessed to conspiracy he had nothing to do with and implicated his friends and let them die "drowned in blood." His "extorted confessions to the Military Board" caused a severe nervous breakdown including the complete loss of his self-respect. He could not forgive himself for betraying his innocent friends. Dr. Monygham's profound and shrewd skepticism is the direct result of his suffering. His self-contempt enables him to question human motives behind material interests. He wisely knows that "[t]here is no peace and no rest in the developments of material interests" because it is "inhuman" (511).

Of course there is danger in Dr. Monygham's skepticism, for it often goes to the point of misanthropy: his "short, hopeless laugh expressed somehow an immense mistrust of mankind. ... At his worst people feared the open scornfulness of his tongue" (44). His distrust of himself leads to that of mankind in general. When he, for example, meets Nostromo coming back from the Great Isabel, he does not appreciate him "humanely, as of a fellow-creature just escaped from the jaws of death" (431). He thinks of Nostromo as no more than a human tool through which he wants to prevent the ruthless destruction of Sulaco by Pedrito Montero. By the same token, he is "utterly indifferent to Decoud's fate" and never even asks what happened to Decoud (431).

Nostromo's accusation of Dr. Monygham as "a dangerous man" has some truth in it, for the latter's devotion to Emilia Gould not only

makes him careless and indifferent toward others but hardens him "against remorse and pity." For example, Dr. Monygham contributes to Hirsch's death by telling a lie as to the whereabouts of the silver ingots. He never shows any regret or pity for Hirsch's fate, as he confesses later: "I did not give a thought to Hirsch" (439).

One should, however, appreciate Dr. Monygham's courage, for Sulaco would have been devastated had he not taken on the risky "game of betrayal." As the narrator indicates,

He was not a callous man. But the necessity, the magnitude, the importance of the task he had taken upon himself dwarfed all merely humane spirit. (439)

The deadly nature of the "game of betrayal" prevents him from showing any tenderness toward others. There is even a nobility in his undertaking of the "game of betrayal" through which he prevents Sotillo from joining Montero by taking advantage of Sotillo's blind attachment to silver. He is noble in the sense that he does so with self-abnegation: "I am the only one fit for that dirty work." The narrator rightly says:

He did not like it. To lie, to deceive, to circumvent even the basest of mankind was odious to him. It was odious to him by training, instinct, and tradition. To do these things in the character

of a traitor was abhorrent to his nature and terrible to his feelings. He had made that sacrifice in a spirit of abasement. (439)

Monygham's "spirit of abasement" is in sharp contrast to Nostromo's resentment and arrogance toward others. The latter saves Sulaco without sincerity and honesty, and the former, without the latter's arrogant pomposity. Dr. Monygham, as Emilia Gould appreciates, "faced the most cruel dangers of all. Something more than death" (507). She further tells him: "People don't know how really good you are. You will not let them know, as if on purpose to annoy me, who have put my faith in your good heart long ago" (512-3).

It nevertheless remains a bitter irony that Dr. Monygham never discards his "temperamental enmity" toward Nostromo and, instead, endlessly questions Nostromo's "fidelity, rectitude, and courage." He rightly believes that Nostromo's character is tainted with duplicity and dishonesty. But he seems to exult too much over his insight. When Emilia Gould comes away from Nostromo's death-bed, he asks her "almost brutally in his impatience": "Now, Mrs. Gould, tell me, was I right? There is a mystery. You have got the word of it, have you not?" Emilia Gould refuses to answer, saying, "He told me nothing" (560). Ted Boyle's criticism, though somewhat excessive, is not without some truth:

"Monygham uses the corruption of others to feed his own ego."²² What is wanted in his nature is, then, tenderness and pity through which he could forgive the human folly. As he cannot forgive himself for his betrayal of his friends, he is unable to exonerate weakness of human beings. As the narrator observes, he is an idealist who "made himself an ideal conception of his disgrace." His "view of what it behoved him to do was severe" and "was an ideal view, in so much that it was the imaginative exaggeration of a correct feeling." It is "a rule of conduct resting mainly on severe rejections" (375). His judgment may be correct yet can make him both heartless and dangerous.

5

Martin Decoud is perhaps the most important character in the novel. Leavis suggests that Decoud's voice is unmistakably Conradian:

Decoud might be said to have had a considerable part in the writing of *Nostromo*: or one might say that *Nostromo* was written by a Decoud who wasn't a complacent dilettante.²³

²²Boyle, *Symbol and Meaning* 174.

²³Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 200.

Leavis notes that Decoud's "consciousness seems to permeate it, even to dominate it."²⁴ Indeed, Decoud's consciousness is still hovering over the "stormy world" of Costaguana even after his disappearance, perhaps amplifying Conrad's own view of life even more. Yet the reader still has the following puzzle to solve: if, as Leavis says, Decoud speaks in Conrad's own voice, why is he almost constantly undermined by recurrent ironic epithets such as "the boulevardier," "the exotic dandy of the Parisian boulevard," "the dilettante in life," and "the spoiled darling of the family"?; why does Conrad kill off Decoud? On the one hand, Decoud speaks with the authenticity of Conrad's own voice. On the other, he is renounced by Conrad. To answer these questions is to unveil the depth and intensity of Conrad's moral imagination.

It is worth while, first, to note the remarkable similarities between Decoud and Conrad.²⁵ By describing Decoud as "the son of his own country nor of any other" (198) or "the adopted child of Western Europe" (156), Conrad may be drawing an analogy between his character and himself. In his Author's Note, Conrad explains that Antonia Avellanos was "modelled" on his "first love" and Decoud could be identifiable with Conrad himself (xiii-xiv).

²⁴Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 199.

²⁵See Martin Ray's "Conrad and Decoud," *The Polish Review* 29.3 (1984): 53-64. Ray gives a good, solid summary of valuable criticisms on the subject.

Gustav Morf goes a step further, suggesting that Costaguana is identifiable with Poland in its tempestuous political atmosphere. He specifically points out that the third of May, the date indicated in the novel, is the National Day of Poland.²⁶ Baines also observes: "[I]t is tempting to see an analogy between [Costaguana] and Poland. It is likely that Conrad was able to express some of his feelings about Poland consciously or unconsciously, using the disguise of Costaguana."²⁷ One cannot, of course, assume that Decoud is all Conrad, yet it is possible to see Decoud as a partial projection of the author himself.

Decoud shares with his creator a sharply penetrating skepticism. It is only Decoud, perhaps apart from Dr. Monygham, who is capable of understanding "a curse of futility" surrounding Costaguana. He perceives that Charles Gould's mine accelerates the interference of other imperialistic countries and thereby nurtures the revolution:

Now the whole land is like a treasure-house, and all these people are breaking into it, whilst we are cutting each other's throats. ... [B]y the time we've settled our quarrels and become decent and honourable, there'll be nothing left for us. It has always been the same. We are a wonderful people, but it has always been our fate

²⁶Morf, *Polish Heritage* 147. See also *Nostromo* 479. Captain Mitchell tells the tourists that people of Sulaco commemorates that date "for the sake of those fallen on the third of May."

²⁷Baines, *Joseph Conrad* 313.

to be ... exploited. (174)

It is most likely that Conrad must have had in mind his mother country Poland which was "exploited" over and over by other countries, Russia in particular.²⁸

Considering Decoud's skepticism, his participation in the major event of the Costaguana politics seems to be incongruous and even odd. But he is the man who will do something for the sake of his passionate desire, even though it does not come "clothed in the fair robes of an idea." He says that his involvement in the "stormy" political affairs comes out of his passion for Antonia:

No one is a patriot for nothing. I have no patriotic illusions. I have only the supreme illusion of a lover. (189)

He maintains that only his love for Antonia makes him a journalist of a local newspaper. Propaganda journalism, however, is for him "a sort of intellectual death," as he tells Antonia: "You keep me here writing deadly nonsense. Deadly to me! It has already killed my self-respect" (180).

However genuine, his love does not seem to be the only force that makes him deeply involved. Decoud finds it difficult to dismiss the

²⁸See Karl's *Joseph Conrad* 40-1. "After the Third Partition in 1795, Russia owned about 45 percent of Polish territory, Prussia 23 percent, and Austria 32 percent."

Costaguana affairs when he himself sees it "on the spot." As he acknowledges, "To contemplate revolutions from the distance of the Parisian Boulevards was quite another matter. Here on the spot it was not possible to dismiss their tragic comedy with the expression, '*Quelle farce!*'" (176).²⁹ He even tells Emilia Gould:

On my word of honour, Mrs. Gould, I believe I am a true *hijo del pays*, a true son of the country, whatever Father Corbelàn may say. And I'm not so much of an unbeliever as not to have faith in my own ideas, in my own remedies, in my own desires. (213)

Regardless of his skepticism, Decoud's tenderness for his country should be appreciated. He is "more of a Costaguanero than [he] would have believed possible" (176). If he were the "dilettante in life," "the exotic dandy of the Parisian boulevardier" or "neither the son of his own country nor of any other," he could not possibly utter such deeply-felt words.

Decoud's letter-writing is another example that may illustrate the affinity of Decoud and Conrad. At the most desperate moment, Decoud writes a letter to his sister in Paris (who never appears in the novel). As the narrator notes, Decoud wants "to leave a correct impression":

²⁹In *Joseph Conrad*, Baines perceptively notes that Decoud "shows a passionate concern for his country's fate akin to that of Don José and Antonia Avellanos" (314).

In the most skeptical heart there lurks at such moments, when the chances of existence are involved, a desire to leave a correct impression of the feelings like a light by which the action may be seen when personality is gone, gone where no light of investigation can ever reach the truth which every death takes out of the world. (230)

Decoud's letter-writing can be compared to Conrad's compositional process. In an essay on Henry James, Conrad expressed the similar view, while comparing the novelist's work to "rescue work":

[A]ction in its essence, the creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values--the permanence of memory.³⁰

³⁰Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 13.

For both Conrad and Decoud, writing was a "rescue work" through which they attempted to "leave a correct impression" for the future reader.³¹

Decoud is "filling the pages of a large pocket book with a letter to his sister," instead of "looking for something to eat, or trying to snatch an hour or so of sleep" (230). Considering the solitude Decoud experiences as he writes, one gets the impression that Conrad projected his agony of writing into Decoud. In a letter to his friend A.H. Davray, Conrad expressed his horror and solitude during the composition of *Nostromo*:

Solitude is taking me over: it is absorbing me. I see nothing, I read nothing, It is like being in a tomb which is at the same time a hell where one must write, write, write.³²

His agony of writing is also found in his letter to H.G. Wells:

³¹See Jeffrey Berman's *Joseph Conrad: Writing as Rescue* (New York: Astra, 1977). As the title suggests, Berman discusses Conrad's works in terms of "rescue work," using Freudian theory.

³²Jean-Aubry, ed., *Lettres françaises* (Paris: Gallimard, 1930) 50. Quoted by Said, *Beginnings* 103.

[W]riting--*the only possible writing*--is just simply the conversion of nervous force into phrases.³³

Indeed, Conrad was an artist who ceaselessly wrestled with the language, not unlike Decoud, in order to "leave a correct impression of the feelings like a light by which the action may be seen." What Decoud tries to achieve is, then, almost identical with Conrad's aesthetics:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you *see*.³⁴

Like Conrad, Decoud is assiduously recording his impression in order to make his sister (the reader) hear, feel, and see.³⁵ Writing as a "recue work" is of "moral imagination" that reveals, to quote Price again, "the depth and adequacy of the novelist's conception of experience; the degree to which he recognizes the complexities of decision or action or inaction and the effort or release involved in solving or ignoring or evading

³³Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 1: 321.

³⁴Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* xiv.

³⁵See Jakob Lothe's *Conrad's Narrative Method* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 216. Lothe thinks that "Decoud's sister performs an interestingly combined function as narratee and reader here." See also Said's *Beginnings* 100-37. Said discusses the novel in terms of "novelistic self-reflection."

problems."³⁶

Decoud's problem is, however, that he never shows any sort of faith other than an audacious one in his own sensations. As Conrad once noted, "What one feels so hopelessly barren in declared pessimism is just its arrogance."³⁷ Father Corbelàn justifiably labels Decoud "the victim of this faithless age" (198). His faithlessness differentiates him from Conrad who, despite his Decoud-like skepticism, was able to maintain an "undying hope." The "want of faith in himself and others" makes Decoud hopelessly vulnerable to solitude at the Isabel. Oppressive solitude is too much for him to fight against. He is "not fit to grapple with himself single-handed" (497). For the faithless man like Decoud,

Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and skepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter belief. (497)

After three days' waiting for Nostromo, Decoud becomes a sort of nihilist, even negating his driving passion for Antonia and entertaining "a doubt of his own individuality." He loses "all belief in the reality of his

³⁶Price, *Forms of Life* xii.

³⁷Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 8.

action past and to come" (497). The universe becomes for him no more than "a succession of incomprehensible images" (498). His intelligence is "swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith" (498).³⁸ In this respect, Conradian Crusoe radically differs from Defoe's romantic Crusoe who maintains "twenty-eight years of patience and self-control."³⁹

Solitude in the Isabel is intolerable so that Decoud becomes utterly "oppressed by a bizarre sense of unreality affecting the very ground which he walked." His agonizing solitude may be a strong reminder of what Conrad himself experienced during the composition of *Nostromo*, as he writes to Edmund Gosse:

I have often suffered in connection with my work from a sense of unreality, from intellectual doubt of the ground I stood upon.⁴⁰

In a letter to John Galsworthy, Conrad even describes himself as a "mental and moral outcast":

³⁸Decoud's waiting is not unlike Vladimir and Estragon's waiting in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. There is a sense of futility and hopelessness in their waitings.

³⁹G.W. Kennedy, "Conrad and Robinson Crusoe," *Conradiana* 10.2 (1978): 115. Kennedy sharply points out the difference between Conrad and Defoe: "Crusoe's single-minded pursuit of material wealth, his relatively simple religious conversion, and his easy dominance over Friday are all false to Conrad's deepest moral and psychological beliefs" (113). See also 113-21.

⁴⁰Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 2: 14.

I feel myself strangely growing into a sort of outcast. A mental and moral outcast. I hear nothing--think of nothing--I reflect upon nothing--I cut myself off--and with all that I can just only keep going, or rather keep on lagging from one wretched story to another--and always deeper in the mire.⁴¹

What distinguishes Conrad from his character, however, is that, unlike Decoud, Conrad was able to overcome the "sense of unreality." "[I]n spite of everything, in spite of impending annihilation," Conrad said, "we live."⁴²

Decoud's "intellectual audacity" was something that was Conrad's own yet nevertheless had to be discarded. Decoud's death is, then, inevitable:

[H]e died from solitude, the enemy known but to few on this earth, and whom only the simplest of us are fit to withstand. The brilliant Costaguanero of the boulevards had died from *solitude* and *want of faith in himself and others*. (Italics added) (496)

⁴¹Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 1: 317.

⁴²Najder, ed., *Conrad under Familial Eyes* 201.

Conrad's repudiation of Decoud should be seen as a courageous self-renunciation. As Guerard observes, Conrad "attempts to separate out and demolish a facet of himself; attempts to condemn himself by proxy."⁴³ To escape "the exile of utter unbelief," Conrad had to eliminate a part of himself that Decoud represents. Decoud's death may have been "a psychic relief" for him.⁴⁴ Joyce Carol Oates's accusation is, then, far-fetched and thereby misses the point: "That a novelist [Conrad] should so humorlessly and willfully punish one of his creatures ... might suggest a certain crude, punitive quality in the novelist"; "Killing Decoud is [not "a moral or aesthetic necessity" but] simply killing Decoud--killing the values and insights and capacity for adoration of the female that Decoud represents."⁴⁵ As Conrad wrote, "Fiction, at the point of development at which it has arrived, demands from the writer a spirit of scrupulous abnegation."⁴⁶ Thus, his repudiation of Decoud surely provides, to use Stewart's phrase, "a curious and suggestive spectacle: Conrad stumbling, groping forward, desperate and arid, through what is, in fact, a complex

⁴³Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 199.

⁴⁴In *Joseph Conrad*, Berman suggests that by his suicide "Decoud achieves a psychic relief" as well as "a mystical unity evoking the deepest awe" (102). Yet it is not Decoud but Conrad who "achieves a psychic relief."

⁴⁵Joyce Carol Oates, "'Immense Indifference of Things': The Tragedy of Conrad's *Nostromo*," *Novel* 9 (1975): 11, 15. Interestingly enough, Oates's criticism sounds like Howe's negative criticism of Conrad.

⁴⁶Najder, ed., *Congo Diary and Other Uncollected Pieces* (New York: Doubleday, 1978) 75.

and majestic artistic whole."⁴⁷ Conrad's artistic process as such was, to use Eliot's phrase again, "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."⁴⁸

Decoud's "want of faith in himself and others" should be perceived as a betrayal of humanity. Conrad had to kill off a "proxy" whose consciousness is very much like his own. Conrad's moral imagination often includes self-renunciation and, to borrow Kirk's phrase, "stride[s] beyond the barriers of private experience."⁴⁹ He was a humanist who "always approached [his] task in the spirit of love for mankind."⁵⁰ It seems that Conrad used Decoud as an "objective correlative" for a modern intellectual who is unable to keep "undying hope" and "faith in himself and others" alive. Conrad created magnificently the fate of modern man for whom life is hopeless and therefore unlivable. His moral imagination makes it clear that life is hopelessly negated and betrayed by Decoud, "the victim of this faithless age."

⁴⁷Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* 202.

⁴⁸T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* 7.

⁴⁹Kirk, *T.S. Eliot* 7.

⁵⁰Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 2: 73.

The revolutionaries remain to be dealt with, for the discussion of betrayal motif in *Nostromo* will be incomplete without including them.⁵¹ Conrad considered "the revolutionary spirit" no less than a betrayal of humanity:

Its hard, absolute optimism is repulsive to my mind by the menace of fanaticism and intolerance it contains.⁵²

Indeed, the revolutionists in the novel are under the illusion that they have been "working for Costaguana alone in the midst of treachery and opposition" (139). Guzman Bento is a notable example of "fanaticism and intolerance." He is described, ironically enough, as "the Citizen Saviour" whose dictatorship is founded upon the idea of eliminating "the evil taint of Federalism" of "the horrid aristocrats" (138). Countless people are arrested and the "cells and casements of the castle on the hill [are] ... filled with prisoners" (371). The breakdown of Don José Avellanos, for example, provides "a truly gratifying spectacle" for him. Bento's ruthless torture makes Dr. Monygham confess to crimes he has never committed.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Heimer's "Betrayal, Confession, Attempted Redemption, and Punishment in *Nostromo*" 561-79. Heimer fails to discuss revolutionaries' betrayals while discussing Charles Gould, Martin Decoud, *Nostromo*, and Dr. Monygham.

⁵² Conrad, *A Personal Record* xxi-xxii.

He often orders impulsively "the celebration of a solemn Mass of thanksgiving, which would be sung in great pomp." Every one is forced to enter the cathedral, "for it [is] not quite safe for anybody of mark to stay away from these manifestations of presidential piety" (139). Even a sacred religion is used for showing off his abusive power. Ends justify means for Bento. He does not care whether his revolution is utterly "imbrued in the blood of his countrymen."

General Montero is another example of "fanaticism and intolerance." The Ribierist government's unreasonable dependence on the foreign investments provides an excuse for General Montero, the Minister of War, to start a revolution. Montero maintains that the national honor was "sold to foreigners" and that Ribiera is "unfit to rule" because of "his weak compliance with the demands of the European powers" (145). Montero is, according to Watts, "able to exploit nationalist feeling against the foreign investors, racial hostility against the whites, and class feeling against the aristocratic land-owning class."⁵³ Montero's revolution, however, actually feeds on greed, corruption, hypocrisy, falseness, rhetoric and ferocity. His own brother Pedro is desperate to gratify his material interests. It is the silver that Pedro has in mind as he invades the province of Sulaco.

⁵³Watts, *A Preface to Conrad* (New York: Longman, 1982) 148.

Unlike the Montero brothers, Sotillo is a mere opportunist without any excusable cause, for he has "no convictions of any sort upon anything except as to the irresistible power of his personal advantages" (285). He initially adopted "the Ribierist cause by the belief that it had the enormous wealth of the Gould Concession on its side" (284). He even tried to make friends with Charles Gould "in the hope of borrowing a large sum by-and-by." "The only guiding motive" was for Sotillo "to get money for the satisfaction of his expensive tastes, which he indulged recklessly, having no self-control" (286). Hearing "the final defeat of Ribiera," Sotillo switches his side to Montero and attempts to show Montero his worth by possessing the silver. The silver, however, makes Sotillo its slave. Dr. Monygham's "game of betrayal" plays a crucial role in further solidifying Sotillo's obsession with the silver. He cannot believe Hirsch who says that the silver was drowned, and rather wishfully believes Dr. Monygham's lie that the silver is buried. (Ironically enough, Dr. Monygham's lie is not a lie, for the silver was actually buried in the Isabel by Decoud and Nostromo.) Dr. Monygham keeps Sotillo from joining Montero by continuing his deceptive "game of betrayal." He pretends to be a betrayer of Charles Gould and makes Sotillo think that he is "ready to sell his countrymen and Charles Gould" (350). Sotillo, a man of "moral stupidity," does not despise Dr. Monygham, for he himself would gladly sell and betray his own country to satisfy his appetite. He would even sell his own soul to the devil to

gratify his "animal instinct."

The "want of moral sense" in Montero and Sotillo tells something about Costaguana's turbulent history which has been devastated by the ceaseless revolutions. As Decoud notes:

[A]fter one Montero there would be another, the lawlessness of a populace of all colours and races, barbarism, irremediable tyranny.
(186)

All the revolutions have "been the cry of dark barbarism, the cloak of lawlessness, of crimes, of rapacity, of simple thieving."

It is the novel's irony that Decoud himself fathers the revolution through which the Occidental Republic is established independently from the rest of Costaguana. The Sulaco revolution is, of course, not without some justifiable cause and genuineness, for it begins as a counter-revolution against Montero's robbery revolution. Yet one has to keep in mind that the Occidental Republic, too, needs and invites other countries' backup. It is "an international naval demonstration" in the harbour of Sulaco which "put[s] an end to the Costaguana-Sulaco War." "The United States cruiser ... was the first to salute the Occidental flag" (487).⁵⁴ Right

⁵⁴Watts suggests that "Conrad was probably aware of the Venezuelan revolution which in 1902 had resulted in an 'international naval demonstration' by Germany and Britain." See Watts's introduction, *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham* 41. Ian Watt, too, observes: "[Conrad] was quite resolutely opposed to the American policies in the Spanish American War, and later in Panama; and when the United States sent cruisers to both the Pacific and the Atlantic sides of Panama, Conrad

or wrong, the foreign interference will always remain a bitterness, perhaps providing an excuse for "another Montero" to start a revolution. (Nothing much has been changed since Conrad wrote *Nostromo*; the recent US invasion of Panama in December 1989 is a telling example.) Furthermore, "the material interests" would take over some genuineness in the revolutionary spirit sooner or later. The "material interests of the foreigners" will precede any sort of patriotism. Father Corbelàn's protest, then, sounds rather naive:

We have worked for them; we have made them, these material interests of the foreigners. (510)

Dr. Monygham retorts and thereby shatters Corbelàn's illusion:

[T]he material interests will not let you jeopardize their development for a mere idea of pity and justice. ... And without them you are nothing. (509-10)

The Revolution of Sulaco is more a problem than a solution in the affairs of Costaguana. Sulaco Republic is, to use Gurko's phrase, "a state

no doubt made this the basis for the 'international naval demonstration' led by the US cruiser, *Powhattan*, which ended the war between Costaguana and Sulaco in *Nostromo*." See Watt's *Joseph Conrad: Nostromo* 78.

within a state, subject not to the laws of the community but to the demands of the moneyed powers symbolized by Holroyd, the American millionaire whose capital makes the San Tomé mine possible, and by Gould himself, who is soon referred to as the King of Sulaco."⁵⁵ The bloody war between the states is inevitable. The people of Sulaco, like Father Corbelàn and his followers (including Antonia Avellanos), intend to "annex the rest of Costaguana to the order and prosperity of Sulaco" (509). The rest of Costaguana will also attempt to unite their country under their ideology. Another civil war is yet to come.

7

Conrad's moral imagination does not choose to flatter the reader by providing an illusion of peace and prosperity. It seems that Conrad defines his own pose as he speaks of Anatole France:

He will flatter no tribe, no section in the forum or in the marketplace. His lucid thought is not beguiled into false pity or into the common weakness of affection.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Gurko, *Joseph Conrad* 129.

⁵⁶Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 33.

Instead, he lets the reader remain disturbed about the fate of Costaguana, for the primary aim of his imagination is "to make you hear, to make you feel" and "to make you *see*." The novel makes the reader hear, feel, and see, to use Gillon's phrase, "the corruption of power or wealth as well as the moral dilemmas they pose."⁵⁷

The stormy air at the end of the novel, however, should not be considered Conrad's total despair. The political human drama in Costaguana may be, as Decoud observes, something like "ploughing the sea" (187), yet one should not cease to wish for a better day. Costaguana may be filled, as Decoud perceives, with "lawlessness," "crime," and "rapacity," yet one should not ignore that some people like Antonia Avellanos "are labouring to change all that." One may "despise" the word patriotism yet the word, as Antonia tells Decoud, stands "also for sacrifice, for courage, for constancy, for suffering" (187).

It is no accident that Conrad chose a line from Shakespeare to serve as the novel's epigraph:

So foul a sky clears not without a storm.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Gillon, *Joseph Conrad* 110.

⁵⁸The phrase comes from Shakespeare's *King John* IV.ii.108. However, it would be far-fetched to draw a direct analogy between *Nostromo* and *King John*. It is enough to take advantage of what the phrase may evoke and suggest.

Conrad's moral imagination maintains that a foul sky could become a sunny day as long as there are people like Emilia who would not "remain blind, and deaf without pity to the cruel wrongs suffered by our brothers" (509). Despite the paradoxes and futilities inherent in human history, one should not cease to hope that "there is no impossibility of its being made so." "Nor should we be blind," writes Watt, "to the positive values in *Nostromo's* ending: the achieved moral closeness and realism of the portraits of Monygham and Mrs Gould are surely not wholly pessimistic in the values they imply."⁵⁹ Wiley, too, notes that love "stands forth as the single value transcending the egotism of a materialistic world."⁶⁰ Conrad's "largest canvas" surely stems from his profound moral imagination.

⁵⁹Watt, *Nostromo* 79.

⁶⁰Wiley, *Conrad's Measure of Man* 99.

Chapter IV

The Secret Agent

Praise and blame to my mind are of singularly small import, yet one cares for the recognition of a certain amplex of purpose.

Joseph Conrad

[A]rt is not, on the whole, the senseless creation of works that diffuse in a void, but a purposeful force; it is intended to serve the development and perfection of the human soul ...

Vasily Kandinsky

1

The Secret Agent (1907) distinguishes itself from Conrad's other works in its heaviest use of irony or, to use Conrad's own phrase, in its "applying an ironic method to a subject."¹ The undisguised irony significantly affects the reader's response to the point where one cannot possibly identify with or have any sort of sympathy with any character.² As Gurko notes, "Conrad deliberately cultivates an emotional gap between the reader and his fictional characters in terms of sympathy,

¹Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (New York: Doubleday, 1926) xiii. Later page references are to this edition and pagination is provided parenthetically within the text.

²See Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 223. He sees "the notable absence of strong emotional involvement with any one character."

liking, or identification."³ The previous novels always have somebody to whom one can feel a close affinity. One may not agree with, say, Marlow's assessment of Jim's jump or Decoud's skeptical view of Costaguanan politics, but one should be able to appreciate Marlow's humane effort to understand another man and Decoud's genuine effort to help his mother country through. Malcolm Bradbury sums up as follows: "Most fiction works by soliciting our sympathy for one or several of the characters, who then help us find our position in the novel, and give us a secure centre of values. But here [in *The Secret Agent*] the irony eliminates those centres of value as they appear, and there are no secure points of identification in the novel."⁴

It seems that Conrad anticipated some controversy over the novel, as expressed in his Author's Note:

There was no perverse intention, no secret scorn for the natural sensibilities of mankind at the bottom of my impulses. (viii)

I have not intended to commit a gratuitous outrage on the feelings of mankind. (xv)

³Gurko, *Joseph Conrad* 167.

⁴Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern World: Ten Great Writers* (New York: Viking, 1988) 93.

The heavy use of irony indeed prompted some critics to argue that the novel lacks a moral energy.⁵ Leavis, however, declares that "*The Secret Agent* is one of Conrad's two supreme masterpieces, one of the two unquestionable classics of the first order that he added to the English novel."⁶ He finds that "the controlling principle" of the novel is "a sophisticated moral interest" and that the irony provides moral depth to the novel rather than stripping it of moral energy:

His irony bears on the egocentric naïveties of moral conviction, the conventionality of conventional moral attitudes, and the obtuse assurance with which habit and self-interest assert absolute rights and wrongs.⁷

Thomas Mann complements Leavis's view as he says: "Conrad's objectivity [stemming from the heavy use of irony] may seem cool; but

⁵See Howe's *Politics* 99, 98. He calls Conrad's use of irony "peevisish" and even calls the novel "a relentless mill in which character after character is being ground to dust." See also Joseph I. Fradin and Jean W. Creighton, "The Language of *The Secret Agent*: The Art of Non-Life," *Conradiana* i.2 (Autumn 1968): 23. They find that Conrad's language in the novel is "stripped of moral energy and commitment to the community of men."

⁶Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 220. *Nostromo* is of course the other.

⁷Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 210.

is a passion--a passion for freedom."⁸ The anarchists' exploitation of "the poignant miseries and passionate credulities of a mankind" was for Conrad "unpardonable" (ix-x). The "revolutionary spirit" was for him even loathsome: "Its hard, absolute optimism is repulsive to my mind by the menace of fanaticism and intolerance it contains."⁹ Indeed, there is nothing in the anarchists' activities in the novel with which one can sympathize. What the anarchists are doing in the society is an outrageous betrayal of humanity. It is not until *Under Western Eyes*, as we shall see, that Conrad will reveal some sympathy toward revolutionary types.

The novel treats the theme of betrayal in its most devastating aspect: betrayal is for the anarchists a profession. They are ready to sell their own country. Conrad, to use Edward Garnett's phrase, "goes down into the dim recesses of human motive"¹⁰ and unveils the nature of their betrayals. The "emotional range of *The Secret Agent* [may be] limited," but "it is by choice, not by incompetence."¹¹ Ultimately, "the ironic perspective invites our moral judgment on an inhumane and materialistic

⁸Thomas Mann, "Conrad's *The Secret Agent*," *The Art of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Stallman, 234. Mann even defined irony as "a form of morality" and "personal ethics." See Mann's *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: Ungar, 1983) 425.

⁹Conrad, *A Personal Record* xxi-xxii.

¹⁰Sherry, ed., *Conrad: Critical Heritage* 192.

¹¹Jack Shadoian, "Irony Triumphant: Verloc's Death," *Conradiana* iii.2 (1971-2): 86.

society."¹²

One of the bitter ironies in the novel is that the justice system is unable to be a counterforce against anarchism and, instead, goes along hand in hand with it. There is, as Anthony Winner notes, "the odious disjunction between things as they are and as they ought to be."¹³ Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner use their power in order to maintain their personal status rather than protect society. The city is *unlivable* not only because of the anarchists but also because of the imbecility of the police. As the narrator notes, the city is like "a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off" (147). This aspect of the novel is reminiscent of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where absence of water is also a focal point:

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water (332-5)¹⁴

¹²Gail Fraser, "Conrad's Irony: 'An Outpost of Progress' and *The Secret Agent*," *The Conradian* II.2 (November 1986): 168.

¹³Anthony Winner, *Culture and Irony: Studies in Joseph Conrad's Major Novels* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1988) 75.

¹⁴See also *Nostromo* 106. Conrad describes the lack of water in his "waste land" devastated by the silver: "The waterfall existed no longer. ... Only the memory of the waterfall, with its amazing fernery, like a hanging garden above the rocks of the gorge, was preserved in Mrs. Gould's water-colour sketch."

The overall impression of the poem is very much like that of *The Secret Agent*. The novel is Conrad's "waste land," in which Conrad makes one see "a monstrous town," "a cruel devourer of the world's light" (xii) or, to use Eliot's phrase, "Unreal City." As Rosenfield notes, "the city of London--with its irrationality, its darkness, its persistent dampness, its monstrous presence--symbolizes a kind of modern underworld."¹⁵ Conrad's scathing portrayal of London, critics have noted, resembles Charles Dickens's in *Bleak House* in which a thick fog swirling about the Court of Chancery serves as a metaphor for people's "heart of darkness"--their delusion, duplicity, and avarice--as well as for the sick society.¹⁶

2

The first member of the "monstrous town" to be introduced is naturally Verloc whose "monstrous" profession is betrayal itself. He would do anything for his own personal gains and is always ready to make a bargain. Verloc began his connection with the Embassy by "stealing the French gun designs" while he was doing "his military

¹⁵Rosenfield, *Paradise of Snakes* 99.

¹⁶See Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Signet, 1964) 17-8.

service in the French artillery"; he got caught in the middle of it because his woman took all the money and betrayed him to the police (19-21). Verloc, a "natural-born British subject," now makes a living by selling his own country. It is one of the novel's bitter ironies that Verloc's betrayal of his own country is committed without any sort of political conviction. He thinks of himself as an anarchist, yet lives and acts otherwise. By definition, anarchist means someone who rebels against any sort of established order and authority. Instead of being a rebel, Verloc is rather a complacent conservative who wants to preserve the status quo:

All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. They had to be protected; and their horses, carriages, houses, servants had to be protected; and the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city and the heart of the country; the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour. (12)

What he really wants to preserve is merely his own "indolence" or "idleness" stemming from a financial and domestic security. The fact is that he is "too lazy even for a mere demagogue, for a workman orator, for a leader of labour" (12). As the narrator notes, there is in Verloc "the

air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly houses" (13). He only wants "the ease of his [fat] body and the peace of his conscience, altogether with Mrs. Verloc's wifely attentions" (5). He is "the victim of a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort" (12).

Verloc's "moral nihilism" or moral stupidity is best illustrated by the nature of his business. He runs a store where "photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls" as well as the revolutionary pamphlets are sold (3). The dancing girl's naked pictures get sold "as though she had been alive and young" (5). "Shady transactions" involved in the pornography business perfectly suit Verloc's "shady" nature and, moreover, "money is easily picked up" (54). Also, the pornography business is for Verloc a perfect hoodwink or, to use Stallman's phrase, "a protective mask"¹⁷ for doing his real job as the secret agent, for it gives him "a publicly confessed standing in that sphere" (54).

As the pornography store is a part of Verloc's precious belongings, his wife Winnie is another. He loves Winnie "as a wife should be loved--that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one's chief possession" (179). The marriage between Verloc and Winnie is, as Winnie herself admits, a "bargain" or business "transaction" (259). Winnie chooses

¹⁷Stallman, "Time and *The Secret Agent*," *The Art of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Stallman, 243.

Verloc over her lover because she thinks Verloc will be able to provide financial security for her family. She marries Verloc, to use Moser's phrase, "purely for convenience, as insurance for Stevie's future."¹⁸ In exchange, Verloc is provided "a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips" (5) as well as the money with which he can start his pornography business. Rieselbach argues: "Verloc marries Winnie because he is physically attracted to her."¹⁹ But Rieselbach, unlike Stallman, fails to see that Verloc "set up the shop with money supplied by Winnie."²⁰ As Ossipon tells the Professor, "it's with her money that he started that shop" (74). Winnie and Verloc both gain from their business "transaction." It is no accident that throughout her marriage life Winnie always maintains her "calm, business-like manner" (57). Winnie and Verloc fail, to borrow Martin Buber's phrase, to "reveal the You to one another."²¹

Winnie's choice of Verloc over her butcher lover is significant because it sheds a light on her betrayal of humanity. Her lover "would hang about" her even though his job is in danger: "his father threatened to kick him out of the business if he made such a fool of himself as to

¹⁸Moser, *Joseph Conrad* 92. Paradoxically enough, Moser, however, claims: "Throughout her pathetic story, Winnie sustains our interest and our sympathy" (92).

¹⁹Rieselbach, *Conrad's Rebels* 46.

²⁰Stallman, "Time and *The Secret Agent*" 242-3.

²¹Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) 95. Failure to enter relation constitutes for Buber evil.

marry a girl with a crippled mother and a crazy idiot of a boy on her hands" (275-6). It is Winnie herself, however, who betrays him and chooses to marry Verloc for whom she never feels love. Her calculating mind senses that her lover's "five and twenty shillings a week" is not enough to support her family. She remorselessly discards her butcher lover and makes a good "bargain" with Verloc. She is a woman "capable of bargain" (259). Boyle, however, thinks of Winnie as "the embodiment of uncalculating natural passion"²² and thereby fails to see the uneasy callousness in Winnie's business capability using "the power of her charms" (190).²³ She hopelessly violates the sacredness of marriage, sacrificing humanity for inhuman "transaction." In contrast to Norman Sherry's contention, she is far from "the type of feminine ideal" or "the self-sacrificing and virtuous female, one who fulfills in one way or another the duties of mother, wife, daughter and sister."²⁴

Of course she makes the "bargain" in the spirit of "self-sacrifice," for Stevie is totally dependent upon her. Her "motherly" care for Stevie is an obsession, in the sense that she bases everything on the idea of

²²Boyle, *Symbol and Meaning* 187. Boyle further suggests that there is "a simple dignity" and "a triumphant quality" in Winnie's story (187, 193). His interpretation seems a misjudgment.

²³Heimer, however, argues (mistakenly) that Winnie "keeps the innocent soul of a child throughout" and "Even in her murder of Verloc, she is in a way innocent." See his "Betrayal in *The Secret Agent*," *Conradiana* vii.3 (1975) 250.

²⁴Sherry, "The Essential Conrad," *Joseph Conrad: Theory and World Fiction*, ed. Zyla and Aycock, 146, 147.

protecting her brother. There is even something agonizing in her obsessive adherence to her brother. Her late father used to abuse Stevie who always ran "for protection behind the short skirts of his sister Winnie" (9). Whenever Stevie was made "scared, wretched, sore, and miserable ... his sister Winnie used to come along, and carry him off to bed with her, as into a heaven of consoling peace" (167). Her father was the man who betrayed his parental responsibility. There is no doubt that Winnie's obsession is the direct result of her father's inhumane treatment of Stevie and her ensuing sacrificial marriage costs anguish and heartbreak. But her father's brutality and violence toward Stevie should not be an excuse or justification for her business "transaction" with Verloc, for such human relationship based solely on convenience is clearly "foreign to all grace and charm, without beauty and almost without decency" (244). As Daleski notes, one must see in Winnie "a perverse denial of self and of life."²⁵

As Leavis accurately observes, the "mutual insulation" characterizes the relationship between Verloc and Winnie.²⁶ Winnie, for whom "things do not stand much looking into" (177), is not quite aware

²⁵H.M. Daleski, *Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession* (New York: Holmes, 1976) 146. Daleski notes: "Her obsessive self-sacrifice results as surely in a loss of self as the obsessive self-aggrandizement of a Gould or a Nostromo" (147).

²⁶Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 210. See also Stallman's "Time and *The Secret Agent*." Stallman notes: "Insularity characterizes everyone in the novel" (237); "each [person is] insulated from another by his own self-love, by self-illusions and fixed ideas or theories" (236). In *Joseph Conrad*, Gurko, too, observes: "the most drastic analogue to the life of man in the swarming city is the persistent failure of the characters to understand and communicate with one another" (172).

of the nature of her husband's business. (Ironically, her refusal "to look into" just to keep water calm is a betrayal of Stevie.) Verloc is under the constant illusion that he is loved for himself. Although he gets "older, fatter, heavier," he still feels that he lacks "no fascination for his own sake" (252). Winnie's mother contributes to Verloc's illusion by thinking of him as "an excellent husband" with whom her daughter made a very "sensible union" (155).²⁷

Ironically enough, it is not the police but Vladimir (an anarchist as well as First Secretary of the Embassy) who shatters Verloc's complacency. He exposes Verloc's paradoxical life style by observing in Verloc's corpulence something paradoxical:

You haven't got even the physique of your profession. You--a member of a starving proletariat--never! ... You are too fat for that. You could not have come to look like this if you had been at all susceptible. I'll tell you what I think is the matter: you are a lazy fellow. (21-2)

²⁷In his letter to Edward Garnett, Conrad says that Winnie's mother "is the heroine." See *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, ed. Edward Garnett, 204. It seems, however, that she is not fully characterized to become "the heroine." Perhaps rightly, Stallman thinks of her as the "Madame of Business Houses": "The life of Winnie's mother has consisted in running what Conrad politely calls 'business houses' where 'queer gentleman' boarded." See Stallman's "Time and *The Secret Agent*" 240.

He even thinks of Verloc as the fat "animal." That Verloc has a wife is almost outrageous to him:

Married! And you a professed anarchist, too! What is this confounded nonsense? But I suppose it's merely a manner of speaking. Anarchists don't marry. It's well known. They can't. It would be apostasy. (36)

Vladimir maintains that anarchists is not supposed to marry because marriage is by its nature an establishment. Anarchists should challenge rather than comply with any social establishment. Vladimir is "beginning to be convinced that you are not at all the man for the work you've been employed on" (36). And he demands that he "furnish fact instead of cock-and-bull stories" (31). He makes it clear that the Embassy "is not a philanthropic institution" and that Verloc will have to "earn" his money:

No work, no pay. (26)

When you cease to be useful you shall cease to be employed. ...
You shall be chucked. (28)

Vladimir orders Verloc to blow up the first meridian so that it would shatter the English complacency and "raise a howl of execration"

(35), because

Madness alone is truly terrifying inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion, or bribes. (33)

"The Attack on the first meridian represents," according to Stallman, "anarchy against Time, blasphemy against God and Nature."²⁸ Its explosion will be "purely destructive." In his absolute destructionism, Vladimir more or less resembles the Professor:

A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion now must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive. It must be that, only that, beyond the faintest suspicion of any other object. You anarchists should make it clear that you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation. (32)

Like the Professor, Vladimir believes that madness is "a force." Yet he, unlike the Professor, is as hypocritical as, say, Verloc. Contrary to his brutal expression, Vladimir has "a drawing-room reputation as an agreeable and entertaining man" (19). While maintaining the idea of

²⁸Stallman, "Time and *The Secret Agent*" 251-2. Stallman discusses persuasively the significance of Time in the novel.

making "a clean sweep of the whole social creation" he frequents the social club in the city.

From the moment his economic security is in jeopardy, Verloc is, to use his own expression, "a doomed ship." To his dismay, his comrades are found useless. Verloc's "saviour" unexpectedly comes to him in the figure of his brother-in-law, Stevie. Winnie, though unknowingly, helps her husband:

You could do anything with that boy. ... He would go through fire for you. (184)

Conveniently, she asks Verloc to "take that boy out with you" (185). She even entertains the idea of the intimate relationship between Verloc and Stevie: "Might be father and son" (187). Winnie, of course, never suggests that Verloc may use Stevie as a human tool for the dangerous mission. Yet Stevie is for Verloc not a human being. He treats his brother-in-law as if he were a cat or dog: "Now, when ready to go out for his walk, Mr. Verloc called aloud to the boy, in the spirit, no doubt, in which a man invites the attendance of the household dog" (187). Indeed, Verloc used to think of Stevie as "his wife's beloved cat" (39).

Stevie, on the other hand, "worships" his brother-in-law, because Verloc is "*good*":

His mother and his sister had established that ethical fact on an unshakable foundation. They had established, erected, consecrated it behind Mr. Verloc's back, for reasons that had nothing to do with abstract morality. (175)

What matters is not truth but convenience. Both Winnie and her mother exploit Stevie's "poignant miseries and passionate credulities." They make him believe what is not true. For Conrad such exploitation was "unpardonable."

Winnie is a bad influence on Stevie. For example, when Stevie asks her why the police would not do anything to eliminate people's misery and poverty, she answers perversely: "The police aren't for that" (172); "They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have" (173). In this respect, Winnie resembles Verloc more than she is aware of. Verloc would say more or less the same thing if he were asked. In fact, Verloc modifies "Stevie's view of the police by conversations full of subtle reasonings" (230). Verloc arouses Stevie's naive sense of social injustice by indicating the uselessness and impotence of the police. Stevie who "can't stand the notion of any cruelty" literally believes Verloc's narration of social injustice: "Never had a sage a more attentive and admiring disciple" (230). He begins to clench "his fists without apparent cause, and when discovered in solitude would be scowling at the wall" (187). He becomes

like "a small child entrusted for the first time with a box of matches and the permission to strike a light" (189). Stevie experiences so complete a brainwash that he refuses to answer Winnie's question, even "squinting" at her.

Despite Howe's argument that Stevie "escapes [the author's] heavy irony,"²⁹ one should be able to see him ironically. For Stevie's "blind docility" also plays a significant role. He is more than willing to "go through fire" for his "sage." Verloc's indoctrination makes him a fanatic who would use any means to achieve his ends. What Verloc says is a law for Stevie. Any idea or even suggestion of social injustice arouses Stevie's "innocent but pitiless rage." He is quite unable to "restrain his passions." As the narrator notes, "In the face of anything which affected directly or indirectly his morbid dread of pain, Stevie ended by turning vicious" (169). Stevie, for instance, grasps the carving knife as he overhears Karl Yundt's terrifying description of capitalists "nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people" (51). The story of "a German soldier officer tearing half-off the ear of a recruit" makes him "shouting and stamping and sobbing" and "He would have stuck that officer like a pig if he had seen him then" (60). Stevie is a born fanatic. He may be innocent yet innocence alone is not an effective weapon against fanaticism. There is surely "a double irony in

²⁹Howe, *Politics* 99.

the portrait of Stevie."³⁰

Having "gauged the depth of Stevie's fanaticism" (229), the admired "sage" commands his "disciple" to blow up the first meridian. Verloc sees no harm there:

The lad was half-witted, irresponsible. Any court would have seen that at once. Only fit for the asylum. And that was the worst that would've happened to him if [Stevie had been caught]. (212)

His moral nihilism is evident here. As long as his own security remains intact, it does not matter whether Stevie goes to the asylum.

Stevie's accidental death, then, comes as a sort of revenge for Verloc's callousness. The address label which Winnie sewed inside Stevie's overcoat discloses Verloc's involvement in the plot. He cannot see the moral significance symbolized by the piece of cloth. Moreover, he even entertains the idea that Stevie's violent disintegration "[would have] only assured the success" if the address label had not been there (235). The event "was like slipping on a bit of orange peel in the dark and breaking your leg" (236). His lack of remorse for Stevie's death makes his moral insensitivity more chilling. What matters is his own safety, as he tells his wife:

³⁰Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) 77.

Do be reasonable, Winnie. What would it have been if you had lost me? (234)

He even expects "to hear her cry out" for his imagined death (234). Winnie should be glad, Verloc says, that her idiotic brother died instead of her husband. Verloc still has "no other idea than that of being loved for himself" (251).

Stevie's tragic ending liberates Winnie. She no longer feels a need to stay with Verloc and "neither could she see what there was to keep her in the world at all." She is now "a free woman" who was suddenly "released from all earthly ties" (251). Her indifference or, to use Verloc's own expression, her "don't-care-a-damn way of looking nowhere," provokes him immensely:

It was you who kept on shoving him in my way when I was half distracted with the worry of keeping the lot of us out of trouble. What the devil made you? One would think you were doing it on purpose. And I am damned if I know that you didn't. There's no saying how much of what's going on you have got hold of on the sly with your infernal don't-care-a-damn way of looking nowhere in particular, and saying nothing at all. (257)

Perhaps for the first and last time, Verloc says something perceptive. Indeed, it is not merely Verloc but also Winnie who is responsible for Stevie's death. Verloc reiterates the point:

[I]f you will have it that I killed the boy, then you've killed him as much as I. (258)

It is at this moment that Winnie feels "something wanting on her part for the formal closing of the [business] transaction" (259). Her shrewd business instinct tells her that something is needed to formally close the "bargain."

Not knowing Winnie's intention, Verloc asks Winnie to come close "in a peculiar tone, which might have been the tone of brutality, but was intimately known to Mrs. Verloc as the note of wooing" (262). Ironically, Verloc brings on his own death when he makes a gesture of intimate love-making. It is significant to note that, when Winnie tries to kill Verloc, her face becomes like Stevie's:

As if the homeless soul of Stevie had flown for shelter straight to the breast of his sister, guardian, and protector, the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes. (262)

Like Stevie, Winnie becomes a fanatic driven by a "fixed idea." The carving knife is "planted" in Verloc's breast.³¹ He "dies without self-awareness, which somehow justifies Conrad's lack of pity."³²

Winnie's "saviour" and "radiant messenger of life" comes in the figure of Comrade Ossipon, who used to send her the "shamelessly inviting eyes." Ossipon is so dear to her, as she tells him:

You took a lot of notice of him [Stevie], Tom. I loved you for it.
(297)

She does not know that Ossipon used to think of her brother as "a degenerate" (46) and now thinks of her as "a degenerate herself of a murdering type." Winnie even becomes for Ossipon "a snake" as he learns that she killed Verloc. Ossipon, another man of business, deserts her, leaving her alone and penniless. The formal closing of her business transaction with Verloc is finally over with her death: "*This act of madness and despair*" (310). She dies, leaving her wedding ring on the

³¹The "final scene between Verloc and his wife" is for Leavis "one of the most astonishing triumphs of genius in fiction." See *The Great Tradition* 214. For Raymond Williams, the scene is "written as living sculpture." See *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence* (New York: Oxford UP, 1970) 148. See also Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* 212. Stewart compares Winnie's killing of Verloc with Tess's killing of Alec d'Urberville in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

³²Shadoian, "Irony Triumphant: Verloc's Death" 84.

seat which has been hopelessly betrayed by her sham marriage.

3

Ossipon, an "ex-medical student without a degree," is obsessed with science. He always perceives human beings "scientifically" and maintains that "all science must culminate at last in the science of healing--not the weak, but the strong" (305). Science is for him an agent of "humanity." Paradoxically, humanity is betrayed in the name of "humanity." His interest in Stevie, for instance, stems from his absurd obsession to find out a human type. Stevie is for him an embodiment of "degenerate" that must be eradicated.

The narrator observes that "the majority of revolutionists are the enemies of discipline and fatigue mostly" (53). Ossipon is no exception and dislikes "all kinds of recognized labour." He chooses the life of parasite and is "sure to want for nothing as long as there were silly girls with savings-bank books in the world" (53). It is chilling to see that Ossipon even exploits his comrade's wife. That Winnie was Verloc's wife does not affect his parasitic instinct. He is rather glad that Verloc is dead. Winnie's "messenger of life" calls her "Unhappy, brave woman!" Ossipon's "usual practice" under similar circumstance used to be "Poor darling!" (276-7). Ossipon's monetary interest does not diminish even

after he learns that Winnie not the bomb killed Verloc. His attitude to Winnie, of course, experiences a dramatic change from that of "Unhappy, brave woman" to that of a snake:

He positively saw snakes now. He saw the woman twined round him like a snake, not to be shaken off. She was not deadly. She was death itself--the companion of life. (291)

He maneuvers to eliminate the "snake" and at the same time to rob her of Verloc's "pocket-book." And he succeeds in both by leaping out from the moving train. Ossipon's cold-blooded desertion of Winnie exposes his callousness and remorselessness. Winnie is left penniless.

One may argue that after he learns of Winnie's suicide Ossipon undergoes some modification. It seems that he is haunted by and obsessed with the newspaper article: "*An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair*" (307). Arnold E. Davidson argues that Ossipon "sees, in the unexpected events of an eventful evening, something of the horrors of his life."³³ Unlike Davidson, E.M.W. Tillyard, however, sees that Conrad's treatment of Ossipon is "the only serious mistake" in the novel: "Granted his previous

³³Arnold E. Davidson, *Conrad's Endings: A Study of the Five Major Novels* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1984) 65. See also Gillon's *Joseph Conrad* 121. Gillon argues that there is a "conscious self-punishment."

presentation, is it likely that he would have been haunted permanently by the thought of Mrs. Verloc's death and permanently put off his amorous adventures? I can find nothing to justify such fidelity to an impression. I suspect that Conrad here unconsciously sacrificed psychological probability to certain demands of plot."³⁴

The interpretations of both critics do not seem the whole truth. It is very unlikely, on the one hand, that Conrad would allow Ossipon (a man of moral stupidity) to see "the horrors of his life." Ossipon's mysterious behavior after Winnie's death, on the other, should not be considered a "mistake," for it indicates no more than his transitory confusion. Since Ossipon gets momentarily confused by the newspaper article about Winnie's death, he decides not to keep the promise with "an elderly nursery governess putting her trust in an Apollo-like ambrosial head" (310). It is not the remorse but the confusion that makes him walk away from that woman. Moreover, there is no need now for him to see "silly girls with savings-bank books," for he has enough money to live on. It is not difficult to predict that Ossipon will certainly resume "his amorous adventures" by the time he spends all the money he looted from Winnie.

³⁴E.M.W. Tillyard, "The Secret Agent Reconsidered," *Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Ed. Marvin Mudrick (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966) 103. Davidson refutes Tillyard's argument by saying that Ossipon's vision of horror is "appropriate." See Davidson, *Conrad's Endings* 67.

As Ossipon's revolutionary career is "sustained by the sentiment and trustfulness of many women," the life of Karl Yundt, "the old terrorist," is also "sustained" by the woman. Like Ossipon, Karl Yundt takes advantage of his comrade's woman. He is "nursed by a bleary-eyed old woman, a woman he had years ago enticed away from a friend, and afterwards had tried more than once to shake off into the gutter" (52). Despite his cruelty towards her, the woman nurses him and helps him get out of the bus. His behavior to the woman rather appears to be sadistic.

Like other anarchists in the novel, Karl Yundt dislikes any "recognized labour." He aims to destroy capitalism in the name of "humanity" yet does nothing else than an excessive talking:

I have always dreamed ... of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity--that's what I would have liked to see. (42)

Do you know how I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic. That's what it is! They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood

of the people--nothing else. (51)

Yundt seems to enjoy the cannibalistic sensation resulting from his excessive rhetoric. His violent rhetoric is habitual so that it convinces or inspires nobody other than Stevie. Ironically, he himself appears to be a cannibal. For example, he has "uncertain and clawlike hand[s]" which suggest "the effort of a moribund murderer summoning all his remaining strength for a last stab" (42, 51). His idea of "the service of humanity" is no more than lip service. Like Ossipon, he is the man who betrays humanity in the name of "humanity."

Michaelis, "the ticket-of-leave apostle," also lives on a woman yet unlike others is patronized by the high-class woman. Michaelis is for the "great lady" "a mere believer" who has "the temperament of a saint" (109). Instead of being sly or deceptive, he is as naive as Stevie.³⁵ What people hear from Michaelis is a sort of Doomsday theory of capitalism, which has been cultivated in his solitary confinement. He thinks that "economic conditions" alone determine everything:

History is made with tools, not with ideas; and everything is changed by economic conditions--art, philosophy, love, virtue--

³⁵However, it seems to be a mistake to assume that Michaelis is "innocent." Nonetheless, U.C. Knoepfelmacher argues that Michaelis is among "Conrad's innocents." See *Laughter and Despair* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 259.

truth itself! (50)

Capitalism is inevitably "doomed" because it was "born with the poison of the principle of competition in its system":

The great capitalists devouring the little capitalists, concentrating the power and the tools of production in great masses, perfecting industrial processes, and in the madness of self-aggrandizement only preparing, organizing, enriching, making ready the lawful inheritance of the suffering proletariat. (49)

His rhetoric is seriously tainted with his inability to reason with and even listen to anyone: "the mere fact of hearing another voice disconcert[s] him painfully, confusing his thoughts at once" (45).

Michaelis divides his book, titled *Autobiography of a Prisoner*, into three parts, "Faith, Hope, [and] Charity" (76, 303). As the Professor observes, Michaelis "is elaborating now the idea of a world planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak" (303). Michaelis's naïveté is somewhat analogous to Stevie's credulity. He has "something of a child's charm" (106) and his "candid infant's eyes and a fat angelic smile" even fascinate his patroness (110). Like Stevie, Michaelis also is unable to see things with reason while he boasts that

his theory of the world is firmly based on "cold reason" (43). It is not "cold reason" but fantasy that his world is made of.

The Assistant Commissioner maintains that Michaelis is "a humanitarian sentimentalist, a little mad, but upon the whole incapable of hurting a fly intentionally" (110). Michaelis's "fixed idea" of collectivism, however, can be deadly and contagious by its inflexibility. There are many people who are eager to listen to his "sweet" words. (Note that he has been "offered five hundred pounds" for his autobiography.) The final destiny of Michaelis's view of human history goes "towards utter destruction." Michaelis does immense harm to mankind by spreading his moral nihilism which is "inaccessible to reasoning" and "formed in all their contradictions and obscurities" (107). Art, philosophy, love, virtue and truth are hopelessly negated and betrayed by Michaelis's moral nihilism.

4

The Professor is uniquely different from other anarchists, as Conrad makes it clear in his letter to Cunninghame Graham:

All these people are not revolutionaries--they are Shams. And as regards the Professor I did not intend to make him despicable. He

is incorruptible at any rate. In making him say "*madness and despair--give me that for a lever and I will move the world*" I wanted to give him a note of perfect sincerity. (Italics added)³⁶

He neither feeds himself on the woman nor follows the order from the Red Committee. The Professor is rather consistent in his own way. Verloc and others paradoxically show their conservative tendency in that they want to preserve the status quo rather than destroy it. As the text indicates, the revolutionaries are "perhaps doing no more but seeking for peace in common with the rest of mankind--the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience" (81). They "depend on life" while the Professor depends on "death" (68). There is no trace in his words or activities that might suggest his conservatism. The Professor is a pure destructionist, whose only aim is to destroy everything artificial such as legality, morality, and any sort of social conventions. "Mine," says the Professor, "stands free from everything artificial" (68). As the narrator aptly comments, his idea is a sort of "frenzied puritanism" (81). He wants to start a new world which will be absolutely free from anything "artificial."

The weak, the Professor thinks, are an impediment to "a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life." Quite opposed to

³⁶Watts, ed., *Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham* 170.

Michaelis's naive but idealistic view of the world in which the strong nurse the weak, the Professor dreams of "a world like shambles, where the weak would be taken in hand for utter extermination":

The source of all evil! They are our sinister masters--the weak, the flabby, the silly, the cowardly, the faint of heart, and the slavish of mind. They have power. They are the multitude. Theirs is the kingdom of the earth. Exterminate, exterminate! That is the only way of progress. It is! ... First the great multitude of the weak must go, then the only relatively strong. You see? First the blind, then the deaf and the dumb, then the halt and the lame--and so on. Every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom. (303)

Unlike other revolutionaries in the novel, the Professor never pretends to have a humanitarian creed, but is outspoken in his "mistrust of mankind" (82). The weak must be "exterminated" to make "a clear start." What matters is not the individual but the pure system "free from everything artificial," for "What happens to us as individuals is not of the least consequence" (72). The Professor would gladly massacre the whole

human race to achieve his ends.³⁷

What makes the Professor more deadly is that he not merely talks but acts. He works "fourteen hours a day" to manufacture the explosive. Extreme poverty does not bother him at all and sometimes he works "without food for a day or two" (70). His aim is not to make money but to "give the stuff with both hands to every man, woman, or fool that likes to come along" (71-2). The explosive is not refused to anybody because he believes that "the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence" (81). Every individual or group who wants to use the Professor's bomb is, then, contributing to his fanatic destructionism of "the great edifice of legal conceptions." He thinks of himself as the "moral agent of destruction" (83).

He always carries the agent of death with him--the detonator which can "blow yourself and everything within sixty yards of you to pieces" (66). In other words, he exploits people's fear. The detonator "by itself," says the Professor, "is absolutely nothing in the way of protection. What is effective is the belief those people have in my will to use the means. That's their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly" (68). The Professor's deadliness forces even the police to stay away from

³⁷It is no wonder that Steve Cox thinks that the Professor's words "are prophetic of fascism and Hitler's Germany." See *Joseph Conrad* 99. See also Gillon's *Joseph Conrad* 114. Gillon notes: "The apocalyptic events of the last two World Wars gave provided many an incident corroborating Conrad's dark vision of humanity in this novel."

him. Chief Inspector Heat is easily intimidated as he is addressed: "you may be exposed to the unpleasantness of being buried together with me" (93).

Compared with the imbecility of the anarchists and the police in the novel, the Professor appears to be "a force," as he claims:

I am the force. (304)

All passion is lost now. The world is mediocre, limp, without force. And madness and despair are a force. And force is a crime in the eyes of the fools, the weak and the silly who rule the roost. ... Everybody is mediocre. Madness and despair! Give me that for a lever, and I'll move the world. (309)

There is no other person mad enough to be "a force." The world is crowded by mediocre petit bourgeois. Even the anarchists are not mad enough to "make a clean sweep." The Professor observes:

The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality--counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical. (69)

The police and the revolutionaries are characterized by their habitual

"idleness" to maintain their status quo. The Professor, on the other hand, shows "his Nietzschean hatred of all middle-class values."³⁸

It is significant to note how the novel ends. It ends with the description of the man-pest:

And the incorruptible Professor walked, too, averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable--and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men.
(311)

The novel achieves its highest level of irony--almost satiric irony--by making the reader see what Northrop Frye called "demonic epiphany"³⁹ in which only the Professor is "the force" threatening the whole society. Worst of all, the evil man remains intact and persists.

³⁸Karl, *Joseph Conrad* 598-9. Karl thinks that the Professor "is, despite his puny appearance, Nietzsche's 'Übermensch'" (598). Edward Said, too, notes the similarity between the Professor and Nietzsche's "Overman." See his "Conrad and Nietzsche," *Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration*, ed. Norman Sherry (New York: Barnes, 1976) 65-6.

³⁹Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 238.

5

There is no question that the inability and incompetence of the police make the city appear more "monstrous." While the Professor remains to be a destructive "force," the police fail to be a counterforce.⁴⁰ There is no indication that the Professor will be arrested any time soon. Chief Inspector Heat is easily intimidated by the Professor and only thinks of preserving his reputation as the "principal expert in anarchist procedure" (85). The Assistant Commissioner detects Heat's vulnerability yet uses it to maintain his relationship with the "great lady," who happens to be Michaelis's patroness. "The Assistant Commissioner and Inspector are in the closest professional contact," Gurko observes, "but they remain almost total strangers even in the matter of police tactics and procedures."⁴¹

Heat's close association with Verloc is a business transaction. Both have "instinctive leaning towards shady transactions." Whenever Heat wants "a hint" of anarchist's activity, Verloc "furnishes" it to him (131). They communicate by letters, as Heat says: "I drop him a line, unsigned, and he answers me in the same way at my private address" (132). In

⁴⁰For a somewhat different view, see Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1986) 153. Rose thinks that the police in the novel are "at least an 'efficient' force for order."

⁴¹Gurko, *Joseph Conrad* 173.

exchange of information, Verloc gets "protection" from Heat: the latter assures the former that "as long as he didn't go in for anything obviously outrageous, he would be left alone by the police" (130-1). Verloc's "shady" house is not even watched by the police and, instead, becomes anarchists' sanctuary. They collaborate with each other and compromise to maintain their reputation: one as the famous Chief Inspector, and the other as the famous Secret Agent. As the Professor notes, Verloc and Heat may "come from the same basket."

There is no other way for Heat to deal with anarchists without Verloc's "hint," for he has no understanding of anarchism. Any anarchist is for Heat a mere "Lunatic" (97). The Professor is for Heat no less than "a mad dog to be left alone" (122). The only criminal activity he can comprehend of is "thieving." According to him, "Thieving was not a sheer absurdity. It was a form of human industry exercised in an industrious world" (91). He believes that thieves are "his fellow-citizens gone wrong because of imperfect education." Unlike anarchists with "no rule," thieves are "sane, without morbid ideals, working by routine, respectful of constituted authorities, free from all taint of hate and despair" (92-3). Heat almost echoes the Professor by thinking that thieves and the police "come from the same basket":

[T]he mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer. Both recognize the

same conventions, and have a working knowledge of each other's methods and of the routine of their respective trades. (92)

Catching thieves is like "open sport where the best man wins under perfectly comprehensible rules" (97).

To his frustration, Heat sees "no rules for dealing with anarchists." Heat's mind is "inaccessible to ideas of revolt" (92). The only way he can deal with them is through Verloc's "hint." His dependence on Verloc's secret information and his inability to understand human psychology make him vulnerable and insecure when he faces the "deadly" Professor. There is truth in the Professor's pointed question: "[H]aven't you made your name simply by not understanding what we are after?" (95). Heat's only shelter is his "consciousness of universal support in his general activity":

All the inhabitants of the immense town, the population of the whole country, and even the teeming millions struggling upon the planet, were with him--down to the very thieves and mendicants. Yes, the thieves themselves were sure to be with him in his present work. (96)

While unable to do without Verloc's valuable "hint," he conveniently thinks that he gets "universal support" from his fellow citizen.

Considering his self-justification, Heat certainly deserves Conrad's severe irony.⁴²

Despite Heat's assurance that there would be "no outbreak of anarchist activity," the bomb is exploded in the Park (84). He assures his superior that "none of our lot had anything to do with this" (86). Verloc's involvement in the plot does not even cross Heat's deluded mind even as a remote possibility: "My opinion is that he knows nothing of this affair" (133). Heat insists without any proof that Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave convict, must be the man at the heart of the bomb plot. It would be "perfectly legal to arrest that man on the barest suspicion" (121):

The rules of the game did not protect so much Michaelis, who was an ex-convict. It would be stupid not to take advantage of legal facilities, and the journalists who had written him up with emotional gush would be ready to write him down with emotional indignation. (122)

The arrest of Michaelis will resolve "a little personal difficulty which worried Chief Inspector Heat somewhat" (121). Even though Michaelis has nothing to do with the plot he can be easily convicted, as Heat tells

⁴²However, Melchiori argues that Conrad "sides with Chief Inspector Heat, the policeman who infinitely prefers thieves to dynamiters because thieves have, after all, the greatest respect for property." See *Terrorism* 81.

his superior: "There will be no difficulty in getting up sufficient evidence against *him*" (114).

The Assistant Commissioner, however, wants to spare Michaelis not because he thinks Michaelis is innocent but because he does not want to offend the "great lady" with whom he and his wife have a close relationship. "If the fellow is laid hold of again," he thinks, "she will never forgive me" (112). He, "a born detective," decides to investigate the bomb affair by himself. He intuitively senses that there is something suspicious in Heat's secret relationship with Verloc and that Heat is trying to "fasten the guilt upon as many prominent anarchists [including Michaelis] as he can on some slight indications he had picked up in the course of his investigation on the spot" (142).

The investigation is rather a power struggle between the Assistant Commissioner and Chief Inspector Heat. The former wants to "turn him [Heat] inside out like an old glove" (119), and the latter wants to drive his superior into the corner: "you, my boy, you don't know your place, and your place won't know you very long either, I bet" (125). In this game, Heat has more to lose because of his shady relation with Verloc whose address label has been found. It comes as no surprise that Heat asks Verloc to "clear out."

Verloc cannot "vanish" because if he leaves his "post" he will face "the danger from his comrades" (221). The prison will be a lot easier and safer than going abroad. It is even suggested that Verloc has been

promised a short period of imprisonment in exchange of his information, for he already talks of his two-year imprisonment (247). The Assistant Commissioner's secret business deal with Verloc shows that he is no better than Heat.⁴³

Seeing that Verloc's imprisonment will be devastating to his reputation, Heat almost implores Verloc to "vanish":

Don't you trust so much to what you have been promised. If I were you I would clear out. I don't think we will run after you.
(209)

Heat seems to assure Verloc that if necessary he will use his power to keep the police from pursuing Verloc.

Truth never comes out because Verloc disappears. The Assistant Commissioner fails to "turn" Heat "inside out" yet is nevertheless able to maintain his friendship with the "lady" by keeping Michaelis from being prosecuted. To Heat's relief, Verloc never speaks out and his reputation as the "principal expert in anarchist procedure" remains intact.

⁴³Kirschner, however, thinks of the Assistant Commissioner as "an idealised projection of Conrad himself." He seems to ignore that the Assistant Commissioner is motivated by his desire not to offend the "great lady." See *Conrad* 87. Christopher Gille is similarly mistaken as he thinks of the Assistant Commissioner as "the man of self-knowledge" who triumphs over "the short-sightedness, corruption, egotism and fanaticism." See his *Movements in English Literature* (London: Cambridge UP, 1975) 45.

6

It should be clear by now that everybody in *The Secret Agent* betrays something yet never gets punished.⁴⁴ Even the death of Verloc and Winnie cannot be considered a punishment because their deaths are self-inflicted rather than imposed by the judicial procedure.⁴⁵ Ossipon, a "humbug," is rather "blessed" with Verloc's bank-notes; Karl Yundt, "the old terrorist," is still nursed by the old woman while still enjoying his violent rhetoric; Michaelis is, perhaps more comfortably, writing his autobiography in a cottage his patroness provides; the Professor is still a deadly force "like a pest in the street full of men"; Heat's reputation is still firm; the Assistant Commissioner's relationship with the Lady is maintained without any crisis. The town is, therefore, still like "a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off" (147).

Conrad's presentation of "a monstrous town" should not be regarded as his vision of life in general. What Conrad does in the novel is, as in other novels, "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel ... [and] to make you *see*" the possible calamities of modern civilization if and when it is dominated by the inhumane

⁴⁴Gillon, however, sees differently: "The betrayers of *The Secret Agent* are all punished." See his *Joseph Conrad* 121.

⁴⁵Heimer, however, thinks that Verloc and Winnie are punished because of their betrayals. See his "Betrayal in *The Secret Agent*" 245-51.

betrayers. Daleski suggests that the novel's vivid characterization of "the violent disintegration" of society makes it "one of the four major English novels that envision the disintegration of the society that in fact collapsed in 1914."⁴⁶

The novel's overall vision is never nihilistic even though the betrayers in it may represent moral nihilism. Any element of nihilism or "madness" in the novel is strongly restrained by Conrad's masterful use of language, as Daniel R. Schwarz rightly observes:

[T]he language is constantly evaluating, controlling, and restraining the nihilism of the imagined world. ... Conrad creates a language that is moral, civilized, and rational, and a narrator with the intelligence and moral energy to suggest alternatives to the cynicism, amorality, and hypocrisy that dominate and prevail in political relationships within London.⁴⁷

As Eliot's *The Waste Land* suggests the necessity of water by depicting the waterless waste land of contemporary society, Conrad's *The Secret*

⁴⁶Daleski, *Joseph Conrad* 157. The other three novels are: H.G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay*, E.M. Forster's *Howards End*, and D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*.

⁴⁷Daniel R. Schwarz, *Conrad: Almayer's Folly to Under Western Eyes* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 157. Schwarz further argues (rightly, I think): "T.S. Eliot's remark about the use of myth in *Ulysses* as a 'way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' also describes one of Conrad's principal methods of evaluating contemporary urban life in *The Secret Agent*" (171).

Agent evokes, as Fleishman observes, "an ideal of social order by its very representation of a world without order."⁴⁸ "Conrad's oblique, ironic methods of viewing the world of nihilistic forces and destructive history were," Bradbury suggests, "ways of confronting the moral ambiguity of a world which indeed needs a very great deal of looking into."⁴⁹ Conrad's moral imagination, to borrow Kirk's phrase again, "aspires to the apprehending of right order in the soul and right order in the commonwealth."⁵⁰

⁴⁸Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics* 212.

⁴⁹Bradbury, *The Modern World: Ten Great Writers* 99.

⁵⁰Kirk, *T.S. Eliot* 7.

Chapter V

Under Western Eyes

To be ethical in the Greek sense is not to preach or to agitate problems, but to see life with imaginative wholeness.

Irving Babbitt

Then Judas, which had betrayed him ... repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver ...

Matthew 27:3

1

Under Western Eyes (1911), which Leavis thinks "must be counted among those [works] upon which Conrad's status as one of the great English masters securely rests,"¹ marks a watershed (or a "shadow-line") in Conrad's treatment of the theme of betrayal. "For the first time," Kirschner observes, "self-knowledge comes to a Conradian hero with a spiritually salutary effect."² Zabel also considers the novel "the drama of a character subjected to the most searching tests of challenge, moral

¹Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 220.

²Kirschner, *Conrad* 101. See also Ressler's *Joseph Conrad* 99. Ressler thinks of Razumov as the first hero who "earns an integrity that satisfies Conrad's severe judgments and enables him to both honor his protagonist and grant him compassion." See also 98-141.

probity, and self-knowledge to which the human spirit can be exposed."³ Indeed, Razumov is the first Conradian hero ever to achieve maturity as well as redemption.⁴ The novel is therefore saturated with, to use Guerard's phrase, "a sympathetic imagination."⁵ One may argue that *Lord Jim* also is the story of redemption. Yet Jim never discards his egoism and therefore fails to attain self-knowledge or atonement. Unlike Jim, for whom Jewel's love is never a factor for determining his fate, Razumov's redemption comes through his love for Natalia Haldin.⁶ Several critics have already noted the influence of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* on the novel. Gillon, for example, observes that "each [Raskolnikov and Razumov] finds his redemption through a young woman's sympathy, faith, and devotion"; "the faithful Tekla of Conrad reminds us of the humble Sonia."⁷

³Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Introduction to *Under Western Eyes*," *Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Mudrick, 136.

⁴See Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 231. Guerard thinks of the novel as "a great tragic novel" and Conrad's "most moving treatment of his central story of betrayal and self-punishment." Guerard, however, fails to note the importance of the theme of maturity and redemption. See also Zabel's "Introduction to *Under Western Eyes*" 111-44. Zabel's excellent discussion, however, is heavily focussed on the existential side of the novel and therefore does not emphasize the theme of redemption.

⁵Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 246.

⁶See Heimer's "Conrad's Betrayer as Intellectual," *The Polish Review* 12.4 (1967): 65. Heimer notes: "a woman's love works a humanizing effect (cf. Antonia's effect on Decoud, and Emilia's on Monygham, both in *Nostramo*) on a betrayer."

⁷Gillon, *Joseph Conrad* 125. See also 124-6.

It is also significant to note that Conrad chose to add the dimension of maturity and redemption to the theme of betrayal in the story of Russia which had been a primary source for Poland's misfortune and suffering. He could not have done so without an absolute "detachment," as he said in his "Author's Note":

My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality. The obligation of absolute fairness was imposed on me historically and hereditarily, by the peculiar experience of race and family I had never been called before to a greater effort of detachment: detachment from all passions, prejudices and even from personal memories.⁸

Otherwise, the novel would have been a form of Polish Russophobia or a mere expression of his personal animosity toward Russia.⁹ While retaining his profound, but relentless, criticism of both autocracy and revolutionism, Conrad was able to go beyond and transcend his personal bitterness toward Russia. In this respect Eliot strikes a point:

⁸Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (New York: Doubleday, 1926) viii. *Later page references are to this Doubleday edition and pagination is given parenthetically within the text.*

⁹Garnett, however, thought that the novel revealed Conrad's hatred of Russia. See Conrad's angry letter in *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, Edward Garnett, ed. 232-3.

The more perfect the artist the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.¹⁰

Conrad was the artist for whom his artistic integrity preceded his "passions," "prejudices," and "personal memories." As W.R. Martin observes, "Russia becomes a means by which Conrad can intensify the pressures that all life is subject to," and the novel is therefore "not merely a novel of Russia, but one about the condition and nature of Man in the light of his own vision."¹¹

2

As Ford Madox Ford once noted, Conrad almost always provides his character "with ancestry and hereditary characteristics, or at least with home surroundings--always supposing that character had any influence on the inevitability of the story."¹² Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov is no exception. He, a "third year's student in philosophy" at St. Petersburg University, is believed to be the bastard son of Prince K. But he is not

¹⁰Eliot, *Selected Essays* 7.

¹¹W.R. Martin, "Compassionate Realism in Conrad and 'Under Western Eyes'," *English Studies in Africa* 17 (1974): 90, 89.

¹²Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1924) 221.

recognized by Prince K. and merely gets his "allowance from the hands of an obscure attorney," who acts for Prince K. His mother (Archpriest's daughter) being dead and his father not acknowledging him, Razumov is "as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea" (10). Razumov's "closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was a Russian" (10). Later in the novel, he even identifies himself with the state:

I don't want any one to claim me. But Russia *can't* disown me. She cannot! ... I am *it!*" (209)

Razumov perceives life as "a public thing" (54). "A man's real life," he thinks, "is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love" (14). Since he has no family ties and no one to "claim" him, his only concern is "with his work, his studies, and with his own future" (10). As the narrator observes, "There was nothing strange in the student Razumov's wish for distinction" (14). He wants to win the silver medal for the essay contest.

Razumov's perception of life as "a public thing," however, is not sustained for long, for it is "crushed" by Haldin's intrusion. Haldin's almost absurd confidence in Razumov does not come from any realistic assessment of Razumov's character or conviction but from a mere superficial surmise of his unconfirmed trustworthiness. Moreover, Haldin

takes advantage of Razumov's having no family ties:

You are the last person that could be suspected--should I get caught. That's an advantage, you see. ... It occurred to me that you--you have no one belonging to you--no ties, no one to suffer for it if this came out by some means. (19)

One should be disturbed by Haldin's exploitation of his friend's solitary existence. Ironically, Haldin persuaded his mother and his sister "to go abroad" long before he assassinated de P., the Minister of State. Razumov's vehement protest against Haldin is not without some justification:

You might have gone to a man with affections and family ties. You have such ties yourself. ... As to ties, the only ties I have in the world are social. (60)

Razumov poignantly and rightly thinks that Haldin "seems to have thought of everybody's safety but mine" (56).

It would be an entirely different matter if Razumov shared with Haldin the same revolutionary zeal. Yet they are two opposites. One is a "sane" student who is "content in fitting myself to be a worker" (61). The other is a revolutionist or, to use Razumov's expression, a

"visionary" who believes that he could turn the world into a Utopia "by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow" (61). Razumov believes:

Visionaries work everlasting evil on earth. Their Utopias inspire in the mass of mediocre minds a disgust of reality and a contempt for the secular logic of human development. (95)

Razumov thinks that he is a man of "cool superior reason," Haldin a man of irrationality.¹³ His reason, as "cool as a cucumber," would not allow him to be a "sanguinary fanatic" like Haldin.

Despite all the philosophical and ideological discrepancies between him and Haldin, it is, however, very likely that Razumov would not have betrayed Haldin if Ziemianitch had not been dead drunk. It is primarily a desire for self-preservation more than anything else that makes Razumov beat Ziemianitch with a "stablefork" and then forces himself into the betrayal of Haldin. It is clear that Razumov at first does not think of betraying Haldin to the police. It is after his failure to deliver Haldin's message to Ziemianitch that Razumov decides to "give him up" (37).

Knowing that he "can't even run away," Razumov tries to rationalize his decision to betray Haldin. He believes that because

¹³In *Political Novels*, Hay suggests that Razumov's name comes "from the Russian *razumet* (to understand), meaning 'the man of reason'" (292). See also Gillon's *Joseph Conrad* 124. It is very likely that the name *Razumov* name comes from *Razumikhin* to whom Raskolnikov goes after the murder. See Feodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Jessie Coulson (New York: Norton, 1975) 93-5.

"Haldin means disruption" he "must be cut off" (34, 36). He wishfully believes that his decision is not based on, to use Cox's phrase, "fear for his own skin"¹⁴ but on conviction and righteous anger:

Betray. A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience. And how is my conscience engaged here; by what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him? On the contrary--every obligation of true courage is the other way. (37-8)

He believes that because there is between him and Haldin no "bond of common faith, of common conviction," he cannot be a "coward" by his betrayal. It would be "true courage" to betray "that fanatical idiot." He is too solipsistic at this point to see that he is betraying his own humanity by betraying Haldin.

Ironically enough, Razumov goes to Prince K., thinking that he can find "a moral refuge" in him. Razumov hopes that his patriotic information on the murderer of de P. "would stir the whole being of that man to its innermost depths" and "would end in embraces and tears"

¹⁴Cox, *Joseph Conrad* 112.

(40). The meeting with Prince K., however, ends in anxiety, fear and distrust, for his "father" leads him to General T. who in turn makes him "his helpless prey" (49). Razumov does not succeed in obtaining General T.'s confidence and, instead, becomes "a suspect" himself (65). General T. senses that Razumov does not tell the whole truth: "And you say he came in to make you this confidence like this--for nothing--à propos des bottes" (48). Needless to say, Razumov keeps Ziemianitch's involvement dark.

The betrayal of Haldin does not bring peace of mind or "tranquility" to Razumov as he wishes. His "tranquility" floats "at the mercy of a casual word [betrayal]" (71). He wonders why he is haunted by his betrayal of Haldin who after all "had done all that was necessary to betray himself" (71). Again, he tries to rationalize his betrayal by writing out his thought:

History not Theory.

Patriotism not Internationalism.

Evolution not Revolution.

Direction not Destruction.

Unity not Disruption. (66)

As Conrad says in his Author's Note, one may sympathize with "an ordinary young man, with a healthy capacity for work and sane

ambitions," who is being "crushed" (ix). One may also identify Razumov's "reasoned political credo" with "Conrad's own."¹⁵ Yet one should not fail to see that "[t]here is so much selfish rationalization in Razumov's suddenly intensified conservatism that we can hardly accept it at face value."¹⁶ Razumov refuses to recognize that his motive for the betrayal was not so much his ideological differences from Haldin as a cowardice stemming from his desperate effort to preserve his status quo. In this respect, Razumov's betrayal differs from Brutus's betrayal in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. However misguided (by Cassius) or wrong-headed, the latter's betrayal is, unlike Razumov's, not tinted with cowardice or desperate egoism.¹⁷

Even though his audacious refusal to accept his own cowardice is troublesome, Razumov is not utterly devoid of moral sensibility. Were he a man like, say, Brown or Verloc, he would rather exult over his betrayal. Razumov's strength is that he is painfully awakened to the

¹⁵Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 242. Guerard seems to be mistaken here. As Batchelor argues, the writing of this credo is no more than "part of the dramatic presentation: a psychological fact about Razumov, not a political fact about Conrad." See Batchelor, *The Edwardian Novelists* 77.

¹⁶Johnson, *Conrad's Models of Mind* 157. Johnson persuasively argues: "there is from the outset something wrong about [Razumov's] conservatism that becomes an excuse for avoiding love, for scorning the passionate, if misguided, enthusiasm of one human being for the soul of another, as when Kostia steals his father's money (at great emotional expense) so that Razumov can throw it out the train window, thinking with unpardonable sarcasm, 'For the people.'"

¹⁷Peter Ivanovitch notes the similarity between Razumov and Brutus: "There is something of a Brutus [in you]" (208). For a detailed discussion of the similarity, see Keith Carabine's "Man's 'Ingenuity in Error': Construing and Self-Deception in *Julius Caesar* and *Under Western Eyes*," *The Conradian* 10 (1985): 94-115.

moral universe by his betrayal. He suffers until (later in the novel) he is "washed clean" by his confession.¹⁸ Razumov is not unaware that Haldin might have escaped had he not been betrayed. One wonders whether "the honourable course would have been to tell Haldin to go away immediately even if at some risk to himself."¹⁹

Razumov, however, does not stretch his uneasiness to the point of guilt and remorse. He is at best confused or, in Garnett's phrase, "ravaged by a whirling anxiety of fear, contempt, hatred, malice, and self-loathing."²⁰ The desire to vindicate his betrayal seems to be the strongest, however. He still resents Haldin's uninvited and blind "confidence" in him. Haldin represents for him "the unthinking forces that are about to crush him ["the thinking reed"] out of existence" (89).²¹ Nonetheless, Razumov's intellectual "superiority" does not prevent him from becoming "as lonely ... as a man swimming in the deep sea" (10).

¹⁸In *Joseph Conrad*, Daleski compares Razumov to the Ancient Mariner in S.T. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner": "Ironically, of course, Razumov's betrayal of Haldin hangs his corpse round his neck just as fatally; and like the Ancient Mariner, Razumov carries that corpse with him--until it drops from his neck when he confesses" (193).

¹⁹Baines, *Joseph Conrad* 365.

²⁰Sherry, ed., *Conrad: The Critical Heritage* 238.

²¹It is very likely that Conrad's "thinking reed" comes from *Pensée*. Pascal says: "Man is a mere reed, the weakest thing in nature; but he is a *thinking reed*. The entire universe need not arm itself to *crush* him; a vapour, a drop of water, is sufficient to cause his death. ... Our whole dignity, therefore, consists in thought. ... Let us endeavour then to think aright, this is the principle of morality" (italics added). See *Pensée*, trans. John Warrington, ed. Louis Lafuma (London: Dent, 1960) 111. David Leon Higdon also discusses the similarity between Conrad and Pascal. See "Pascal's *Pensée* 347 in *Under Western Eyes*," *Conradiana* v.2 (1973): 81-3.

Ironically, "the man of reason" is "misunderstood" and unappreciated by everybody so that he experiences an overwhelming "moral loneliness" (307). As always in the Conradian world, intellect is no effective weapon against loneliness.

Solitude makes Razumov vulnerable. "The obscure, unrelated young student Razumov" finds that he is "an object of interest to a small group of people of high position [particularly Councillor Mikulin]" (307-8). "To be understood appeared extremely fascinating" (297). Razumov does not understand that Mikulin is trying to exploit his vulnerability. As the narrator observes, Mikulin is the man who would do anything "as long as the man could be made to serve" (307). With the aid of Prince K., Mikulin easily succeeds in making Razumov a police agent. Perhaps, Razumov's resentment against revolutionists facilitates Mikulin's sly plan to make him a secret agent.

By agreeing to be a police agent, Razumov seeks a sort of revenge on "the unthinking forces" that have crushed him. It is indeed with the spirit of revenge that Razumov comes to Geneva, a sort of sanctuary for Russian revolutionists. He wants "to confirm myself in my contempt and hate for what I betrayed," because "I had security stolen from me, years of good work, my best hopes" (359). He is wilfully surrendering himself to "falsehood" by seeking "retributive justice" (261), as he later confirms:

I embraced the might of falsehood, I exulted in it--I gave myself

up to it for a time. (360)

Razumov even wants to "steal [Haldin's] sister's soul" (359). He sees human beings as no more than a convenient tool to soothe his spite. Later he writes to Natalia:

If you could have looked then into my heart, you would have cried out aloud with terror and disgust. (359)²²

He even tells a lie to Haldin's mother about how Haldin met his death. Having been made safe by Ziemianitch's suicide, he tells her that Haldin was betrayed by that man.

Contrary to his wicked intentions to "steal" Natalia's soul, Razumov, however, ends by loving her. His love for Natalia awakens him to humanity that has been dormant in him. As Brodie puts it, "Only through her truthfulness can he see the baseness of his attempts to protect himself at the expense of others; only through her unselfish, trusting nature does he begin to sense the importance of solidarity."²³ At long last he attains a self-knowledge:

²²In *Conrad's Rebels*, Rieselbach argues that Razumov unconsciously wants to replace Haldin "in the affections of his mother and sister" yet the dread of incest "prompts Razumov's extravagant horror"(84); she also thinks that "the novel's view of human relationship, and especially sexual relationships, is even bleaker than *The Secret Agent*" (85). However ingenious, Rieselbach's Freudian reading of Conrad goes too far.

²³Brodie, "Conrad's Feminine Perspective" 144.

In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely. (361)²⁴

He now knows that the spirit of Haldin is still alive in the minds of his sister and mother and that his spirit alone lives in a limbo of revenge and hate: "I was given up to evil" (359). His love now awakens his dormant conscience, as he writes Natalia later: "You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace" (358). His hate for Haldin who "robbed me of my hard-working, purposeful existence" ends in the love for Natalia whose truthfulness becomes an antidote for his "falsehood."

It is Natalia who disarms Razumov's burning desire for revenge. Unlike Razumov, she does not "believe in the duty of revenge." Instead, it is "union" and "love" that she believes in:

Listen, Kirylo Sidorovitch. I believe that the future will be merciful to us all. Revolutionist and reactionary, victim and executioner, *betrayed* and *betraying*, they shall all be pitied together when the light breaks on our black sky at last. Pitied and

²⁴Gillon notes a "striking similarity" between Razumov and Raskolnikov. For instance, Raskolnikov says after his murder: "Was it the old hag I killed? No, I killed *myself* and not the old hag." See Gillon's *Joseph Conrad* 125.

forgotten; for without that there can be no union and no love.
(Italics added) (353)

While Razumov is obsessed with hatred and vengeance Natalia is "looking forward to the day when all discord shall be silenced" and when "the anguish of hearts shall be extinguished in love" (376, 377).

Considering Natalia's earnest belief in love and union, there seems, however, an inconsistency in her character. It is somewhat disturbing to see that after Razumov gets maimed by revolutionists as the result of his confession she chooses not to visit Razumov at the hospital. Tekla, "a good Samaritan," rightly accuses her of having "no heart" (373). Instead of seeking to comfort Razumov, she is preoccupied by the state of her defenselessness: "I *was* defenseless" (376). In this respect, it is fortunate that Razumov and Natalia do not marry and have a child who resembles the late Haldin.²⁵

Tekla's devotion to the crippled Razumov can be, then, a foil to Natalia's almost cold posture. Tekla once nursed Andrei, a young lithographer, who, under torture, "let out some information" about the matter of "temperance tracts" (151, 153). The fate of Andrei is somewhat similar to that of Dr. Monygham (*Nostromo*). Under severe torture, they

²⁵See Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad* 2: 64. The letter to Galsworthy reveals Conrad's original plan: Razumov and Natalia were to marry and have a child who resembles the dead Haldin.

both betrayed their friends by letting out some information and then got freed with "a crushed spirit in that mangled body" (153). Yet Andrei, unlike Dr. Monygham, never recovers from the "crushed" spirit till his death. "Nothing I found to say," Tekla says, "could make him whole" (153). While she could not revive the "doomed" lithographer's spirit she "ventured into the streets to beg for a crust of bread" and fed him. Sometimes she "got nothing, and then [she] would crawl back and lie on the floor by the side of his couch" (153). Unlike Natalia who believes that "concord is not so very far off" (103), Tekla (the "disillusioned" woman) thinks otherwise:

[A] belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness. (151)

Despite the temperamental differences between them, Tekla and Natalia together play crucial roles in Razumov's final fate that can be seen as the phase of redemption. By his confession to Natalia, Razumov, first, makes "himself free from falsehood" (368). As Christopher Cooper observes, Razumov "has been able to win back his self esteem and, whatever the physical loss involved, has won for himself moral wholeness."²⁶ Although his confession brings him severe physical

²⁶Christopher Cooper, *Conrad and the Human Dilemma* (London: Chatto, 1970) 104.

suffering, he is redeemed spiritually.²⁷ Secondly, he is accompanied by Tekla, "a good Samaritan by an irresistible vocation" (374), and is content to live an obscure life in Russia. He is even forgiven by the revolutionaries, as Sophia Antonovna says:

Some of *us* always go to see him when passing through. He is intelligent. He has ideas. ... He talks well, too. (379)

However bitter, Razumov's "triumph is a genuine one."²⁸

Conrad's use of thunderstorm and rain contributes to a dramatic aspect of Razumov's redemption.²⁹ During the time of his confession to Natalia as well as to revolutionists at Laspara's house, the relentless, violent thunderstorm and a deluge of rain strike the earth. After the confession, Razumov is unable to hear the sound of raining because his ear drums were "burst":

The lightning waved and darted round him its silent flames, the

²⁷Yet Cox sees Razumov's confession as "a kind of suicide." See *Joseph Conrad* 116.

²⁸Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* 239. Tony Tanner also notes: Razumov acquires great stature, not only because of what he suffers, but because in the depths of that suffering he discovers that no matter what is in the balance he cannot live a lie." See Tanner, "Nightmare and Complacency: Razumov and the Western Eye," *Heart of Darkness, Nostromo and Under Western Eyes: A Casebook*, Ed. C.B. Cox (London: Macmillan, 1981) 184.

²⁹Karl thinks the symbolism "adds nothing at all to the novel." See his *Reader's Guide* 226-7.

water of the deluge fell, ran, leaped, drove--noiseless like the drift of mist. (369)

In the morning, it stops raining and the weather regains its calmness. No more rain is needed, for Razumov, a "soaked man," is now "washed clean" and already returned to humanity.

3

In his Author's Note, Conrad was severely critical of the lawlessness of both autocracy and revolutionism:

The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions. These people are unable to see that all they can effect is merely a change of names. (x)

One of the novel's central concerns is, then, "the moral corruption of

oppressed society." We are invited to witness how autocracy and revolutionism betray humanity. In a lawless and dehumanized society, life-enhancing values are not found and, to use Yeats's memorable phrase,

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

("The Second Coming" 4-6)

The narrator similarly notes:

[T]he noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companions of an uneasy despotism. (7)³⁰

One of the most dangerous and prominent betrayers, who may represent the "moral anarchism" of an autocratic rule, is Mr. de P., "the President of the notorious Repressive Commission of some years ago, the

³⁰This passage is somewhat reminiscent of Conrad's criticism of Russia in "Autocracy and War" in which he describes Russia as "a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience." See his *Notes on Life and Letters* 100.

Minister of State invested with extraordinary powers" (7). He "served the monarchy by imprisoning, exiling, or sending to the gallows men and women, young and old, with an equable, unwearied industry" (7). He even declared:

[T]he thought of liberty has never existed in the Act of the Creator. From the multitude of men's counsel nothing could come but revolt and disorder; and revolt and disorder in a world created for obedience and stability is sin. It was not Reason but Authority which expressed the Divine Intention. God was the Autocrat of the Universe. (8)

He destroys "the very hope of liberty itself" in the name of God and justice (8). Haldin rightly believes that de P. "was uprooting the tender plant" and "[t]hree more of years of his work would have put us back fifty years into bondage" (16). Mr. de P. "was bent on extirpating from the land every vestige of anything that resembled freedom in public institutions" (7). It is a bitter irony that de P. hypocritically invokes "the love of God" even when he is killed (9). Religion is for de P. no more than a tool for maintaining autocratic rule.

General T. is another ruthless defender of autocracy. He does not appreciate Razumov's information about Haldin and, instead, makes him a "suspect." As Razumov notes, General T. "would be capable of

suspecting his own wife, if Haldin had gone to her boudoir with his confession" (70). Like de P., General T. also wants to destroy "lovers of liberty" in the name of God and justice:

I detest rebels. These subversive minds! ... My existence has been built on fidelity. It's a feeling. To defend it I am ready to lay down my life--and even my honour--if that were needed. But pray tell me what honour can there be as against rebels--against people that deny God Himself--perfect unbelievers! Brutes. (51)

According to General T., people who rebel against despotism are "brutes" and "perfect unbelievers" who should be "destroyed." The heathens, who "deny God Himself," must be exterminated. General T.'s fanaticism and his lack of tolerance are characteristic of moral anarchism in autocratic rule.

Councillor Mikulin reveals another aspect of moral anarchism in autocracy. Unlike de P. and General T. who use the violent rhetoric and ultimately resort to brutality, Mikulin speaks softly and is known "to be an enlightened patron of the art of female dancing" (305). It seems that he even sympathizes with Razumov's impasse. Mikulin, however, is more dangerous, more hypocritical than de P. and General T., for he depends on deception and manipulation. General T. and de P., for instance, could never have succeeded in making Razumov a spy. Unlike de P. and

General T., Mikulin has an understanding of human psychology, as the narrator notes:

Things and men have always a certain sense, a certain side by which they must be got hold of if one wants to obtain a solid grasp and a perfect command. The power of Councillor Mikulin consisted in the ability to seize upon that sense, that side in the men he used. It did not matter to him what it was--vanity, despair, love, hate, greed, intelligent pride or stupid conceit, *it was all one to him as long as the man could be made to serve.* (Italics added) (307)

It is not surprising that Mikulin ingeniously turns Razumov into a spy by showing some understanding of Razumov's dilemma. Razumov's terrible loneliness, stemming from his being "mistrusted" and "misunderstood," makes him vulnerable and almost defenseless. Mikulin becomes "the only person on earth with whom Razumov could talk, taking the Haldin adventure for granted" (304).

The language that Mikulin uses is never menacing or violent, yet the content of it is more sinister and more intimidating. He, for instance, asks Razumov: "Where to?" (99). It seems almost naive and childish to ask "Where to?" Yet the question is "sufficiently appalling to Razumov":

Where to? Back to his rooms, where the Revolution had sought him out to put to a sudden test his dormant instincts, his half-conscious thoughts and almost wholly unconscious ambitions, by the touch as of some furious and dogmatic religion, with its call to frantic sacrifices, its tender resignations, its dreams and hope uplifting the soul by the side of the most sombre moods of despair. (294)

The sensitive man like Razumov cannot ignore the menace inherent in the question "Where to?" Mikulin says that for a man like Razumov "simply to retire" is "impossible." Razumov should come back to serve the state because "abstention, reserve, in certain situations, come very near to political crime" (294). "You are," Mikulin says, "going away free as air, but you will end by coming back to us" (295). Razumov has "been already the instrument of Providence" and God "wills" further action from Razumov. Mikulin creates an earthly hell whose flame Razumov cannot extinguish until he becomes "a soaked man" by the deluge of rain later in the novel.

The dangerous side of Mikulin's character is further illustrated in his handling of Nikita, "a perfect flower of the terroristic wilderness" (ix), who "burst the drums of [Razumov's] ears purposely ... as if carried away by indignation," yet turns out to be "a traitor himself, a betrayer" (380). Like Razumov, Nikita is Mikulin's agent. Mikulin wants to get rid

of Nikita, perhaps because he "might have grown tired of him, or frightened of him." He chooses to eliminate Nikita by informing Peter Ivanovitch of "the true character of the arch-slayer of gendarmes" (381). It is not to say that Nikita does not deserve the punishment. The point is that Mikulin's ingenious elimination of Nikita is not different from his manipulation of Razumov.

Despite his loyalty to autocracy, Mikulin himself becomes a victim of "the savage autocracy" and is "devoured" by it. He gets arrested and executed because he is believed to have something to do with political intrigues. It is not certain whether he really got involved in "intrigues." Truth does not matter in the lawless society, for "the savage autocracy ... does not limit its diet exclusively to the bodies of its enemies. It devours its friends and servants as well" (306). Despite his claim of innocence, "the terribly heavy sentence turned Councillor Mikulin civilly into a corpse" (306).

Prince K., "a senator, a dignitary, a great personage," remains to be dealt with. It may sound odd to categorize him as a betrayer. Yet his treatment of his bastard son is no less than a betrayal of humanity. As Rieselbach notes, Prince K.'s "refusal to acknowledge paternity" is a betrayal.³¹ He does not want any close relationship with his bastard son. He also fails to provide "moral refuge" for his son and, instead, lets

³¹Rieselbach, *Conrad's Rebels* 65.

Mikulín take advantage of Razumov's solitude. Mikulín tells Razumov:

Prince K. is aware of everything that is being done, and I don't mind informing you that he approved my intention of becoming personally acquainted with you. (97-8)

It is plain that Razumov becomes a spy through the intervention of his father. By neglecting his parental responsibility and even joining Mikulín's victimization of his son, Prince K. hopelessly betrays humanity. His fidelity is not to his son but to the cannibalistic autocracy.

4

Despite his treatment of the lawless autocracy, there is some ambivalence, some tint here of Conrad's sympathy towards revolutionists. It is not to say that Conrad accepts their ideological ground. He is relentlessly critical of it. A "Utopian revolutionism" is "no less imbecile and atrocious" than an autocratic rule. Conrad makes it clear that revolutionists serve their cause slavishly and in so doing betray humanity. Their reliance on violence and their naive belief in a Utopian society are far from humane. One cannot, however, easily condemn the revolutionists in the novel. While there are outrageously hypocritical revolutionists,

such as Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S., there are also some revolutionists, such as Natalia Haldin, Tekla, and Sophia Antonovna, whose selflessness induces one to sympathize with them. For instance, "[t]he understanding and pity some of them show to the crippled young man," Gillon notes, "enhance their humanity."³² Gekoski also notes: "Unlike the almost wholly laughable group of 'anarchists' assembled under the paunchy wing of Verloc, the Geneva revolutionary group has a certain variety and depth."³³ Nevertheless, one should not fail to notice the futility even in the activities of the selfless revolutionists, for all of them are characterized by their naive faith that they can turn the wronged society into a Utopia. "These people are," says Conrad, "unable to see that all they can effect is merely a change of names" (x).

Because of Conrad's ambivalence, it is difficult to assess, for instance, Haldin as a character. One tends to vacillate between sympathy and judgment. On the one hand, Haldin's aspiration is not without some genuineness and sincerity. He rightly sees de P. as an enormous threat to freedom. Had there not been the "imbecility and ferocity of an autocratic rule," Haldin would not have committed the reckless murder of de P. He may be naive in his belief that by assassinating the ferocious de P. he can eliminate all the evils from society.

³²Gillon, *Joseph Conrad* 130.

³³Gekoski, *Conrad* 162.

On the other, he ruins Razumov's "sane ambition" by coming to him for help. While he pursues a public cause he tends to forget the importance of the value of individual. As Razumov observes bitterly, Haldin might "be looked upon as a martyr some day--a sort of hero--a political saint" (61). Haldin does not understand why Razumov "begs to be excused" from political martyrdom. Dangerously enough, he takes it for granted that Razumov has nothing to suffer because he has no family ties. Another danger in Haldin's character is his fanaticism. He is "ready to die" for the cause he believes in; by the same token he is ready to sacrifice any individual's life if necessary. By throwing the bomb over de P., Haldin kills not only de P. but also his own accomplice and innocent bystanders. Haldin's determination to execute "the mission" at the cost of "innocent people" is chilling. It is a bitter irony, however, that he persuaded his family "to go abroad" long before "scattering death" (22). One may understand his affection for his mother and sister, but his indifference to other people's existences (including Razumov's) makes him appear callous and hollow.

Again, one has to come back to Haldin's noble side. If Haldin had chosen to ruin Razumov's life he could have done it easily. But he refuses to tell the police Razumov's secret errand to Ziemianitch even though he is plainly told that Razumov was his betrayer. There is some nobility not only in his determination to die for the cause but also in his refusal to betray the man who has betrayed him. Unlike Razumov's

intense, egocentric hatred for him, Haldin does not show his enmity for his betrayer:

They can kill my body, but they cannot exile my soul from this world. ... I believe in this world so much that I cannot conceive eternity otherwise than as a very long life. That is perhaps the reason I am so ready to die. ... As to the destroyers of my mere body, I have forgiven them beforehand. (58)

Even though he dies, his "spirit shall go on warring in some Russian body till all falsehood is swept out of the world" (22). His anger rather goes against "the oppressors of thought which quickens the world, the destroyers of souls which aspire to perfection of human dignity" (58).

To some extent, Haldin's willingness to forgive his betrayer can be compared to Christ's forgiving grace. Haldin's mother compares, though indirectly and unknowingly, Razumov to Judas:

Even amongst the Apostles of Christ there was found a Judas.
(115)

Like Judas who repented--"I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood"--and "hanged himself,"³⁴ Razumov at last repents and punishes himself by confessing to the betrayal of Haldin. Haldin may be regarded as Razumov's "saviour," since his "moral spectre" forces Razumov to realize that he acted against "human dignity" by betraying his friend. Later in the novel, Razumov becomes mature enough to realize that "[Haldin] saves me. ... He himself, the betrayed man" (362). This is one of the few explicit occasions in which a Conradian hero attains self-knowledge.

Natalia Haldin shares with his brother a purely Utopian vision of society. She is a "visionary" who strongly believes that "[o]ne must look beyond the present" (345). The present turmoil is for her a way to "concord" which "is not so very far off" (104). She regards her brother's activity as a necessity. Like Haldin, she would cease to think of herself and "would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread."³⁵ "The true progress," she says, "must begin after [all these struggles for liberty]" (135). It is not hatred but love that she believes in. It is not discord but concord that she is "looking forward to."

³⁴King James Version, Matthew 27.4-5. But one should not literally identify Haldin with Christ. Haldin is too profane to be a "saviour." In *Paradise of Snakes*, Rosenfield indicates: "The application of Christian myth to social revolution does reflect Conrad's ironic comment upon the creatures of his making" (131). For a more detailed discussion, see also 123-72.

³⁵Considering Natalia's faith in love, it is no accident that despite his ironic view of revolutionism, Conrad chose her words for the epigraph of the book.

Her faith in "love" may sound naive yet hardly dismissible. She shows something affirmative in the Utopian revolutionism. After Razumov's confession to her, Natalia chooses to live "in the centre" of Russia, "sharing her compassionate labours between the horrors of over-crowded jails, and the heartrending misery of bereaved homes" (378).

One of the bitter ironies, however, is that while affirming "love" she loses her individual identity, as the narrator notes dejectedly:

There was no longer any Natalia Haldin, because she had completely ceased to think of herself. It was a great victory, a characteristically Russian exploit in self-suppression. (375)

The loss of individual identity is not a virtue in Conrad's art.³⁶ Perhaps the deliberate obliteration of individual ego is, in a very delicate sense, a betrayal of humanity. To be a whole being, one should be able to keep the balance between one's self and others. It is a fallacy to think that, as the immature Razumov says, "Life is a public thing" (54). As Haldin's indifference to Razumov's fate shows, the person who ceases to think of the self also ceases to think of others. Natalia, who "ceased to think of herself," never bothers about visiting Razumov who was maimed. Razumov can be a foil in this respect, for the "self-suppression" is

³⁶See Johnson's *Conrad's Models of Mind* 41-53. Johnson discusses the importance of keeping one's "sense of ego."

something Razumov would never possibly embrace: "a mere blind tool I can never consent to be" (229); "I am independent" (362).³⁷

There is another woman whose fate more or less resembles Natalia's not only in her aspiration for social justice but in her "self-suppression." Sophia Antonovna is the woman who began her revolutionary career at the age of sixteen. Her life has been a continuous "revolt" against "the great social inequity of the system resting unrequited toil and unpitied sufferings" (262). Like Natalia, she has a righteous anger against the needless sufferings of Russians:

Truly there are millions of people in Russia who would envy the life of dogs in [Geneva]. It is a horror and a shame to confess this even between ourselves. One must believe for very pity. This can't go on. No! It can't go on. ... You've got to trample down every particle of your own feelings; for stop you cannot, you must not. (245)

Indeed, she did "trample down every particle of [her] own feelings" just for the cause she believed in. There is in Sophia a spirit of selflessness. Like Natalia who believes that "concord" will prevail in the end, Sophia

³⁷Considering Razumov's independence, it is hard to believe Fleishman's view that "Razumov is found at the close of the novel in the role of a patron saint of the revolutionists." It seems that "Razumov's quest for community" (Fleishman's phrase) is not necessarily accompanied by a belief in revolutionism. See *Conrad's Politics* 237.

has a firm belief that "Everything is bound to come right in the end" (245). Razumov himself, a scornful skeptic, acknowledges that "he could not despise her as he despised all the others" (242). While her selflessness should not be despised or dismissed, there is in Sophia Antonovna a frightening feature--"self-suppression." She even gave up her lover, for the individual's love was for her not as important as the love for the public. As indicated before, the loss of self is, in a delicate sense, no less than a betrayal of humanity. The aged woman revolutionist still does not realize that life as "a public thing" is not enough. She has only her public identity. It is obvious that her belief is "wrong-headed."

Conrad's most biting and most damaging criticism on revolutionism appears in his relentless treatment of Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S. In his Author's Note, Conrad speaks of them as "the apes of a sinister jungle" (ix). By "the apes" Conrad is suggesting that they are utterly devoid of human quality. Hypocrisy characterizes both of them. Peter Ivanovitch is known to be a profound advocate of feminism, yet turns out to be otherwise. He practices his feminism "under the rites of special devotion to the transcendental merits of Madame de S." (125). He says what he does not believe: Madame de S. "is a perpetual manifestation of a noble and peerless spirit" (129-30). His real interest, however, is her money (249).

Ivanovitch pretends to believe "woman's spiritual superiority" (121). According to him, woman is capable of understanding everything:

There is positively in all the range of human sentiments no joy and no sorrow that woman cannot understand, elevate, and spiritualize by her interpretation. (127)

The greatest part of our hopes rests on women. I behold their thirst for knowledge. It is admirable. Look how they absorb, how they are making it their own. It is miraculous. (119)

His attitude towards women, however, suggests that his belief in feminism is no more than a sham. The "great feminist" Ivanovitch turns out to be "the great antifeminist."³⁸ Despite his rhetoric, Madame de S. is never even "consulted" (146). His ruthless abuse of Tekla, "the lady companion," is another example of his double standard. Tekla is a sort of stenographer for him as well as a servant for Madame de S. She used to take Ivanovitch's dictation for a long time yet was never appreciated. Instead, he would abuse her: she is not allowed to move during his dictation; when she looks at him he roars, saying that she stares "so stupidly"; to use his own expression, Tekla's "air of unintelligent expectation" irritates him. It is no wonder that the "disillusioned" Tekla has "been starving ... just for a little civility," as she tells Razumov:

³⁸Maureen Fries, "Feminism-Antifeminism in *Under Western Eyes*," *Conradiana* v.2 (1973): 56.

"Directly I saw you for the first time I was comforted. You took your hat off to me" (233).

It seems that feminism is for Peter Ivanovitch a convenient means to show his male superiority. As Tekla sharply observes, he "can't bear thinking of any one escaping him" (237). He "must direct, inspire, [and] influence." He is "an awful despot" (232). He accuses Natalia of being too reserved simply because she would not allow him to "direct" her life:

We Russians have no right to be reserved with each other. In our circumstances it is almost a crime against humanity. The luxury of private grief is not for us. (127)³⁹

He would not allow her to have "the luxury of private grief" over her beloved brother's death. He wants Natalia to be a "fanatic" (129). A "crime against humanity" is committed in the name of "humanity" by himself.

Madame de S., looking more like a corpse than the living, pretends to be an ardent believer of revolutionism, yet is full of contradictions. She believes that "[t]he discontent should be spiritualized" because there is no other way of making discontent "effective and universal" (221). But she merely speaks for the sake of it. Moreover, it is

³⁹Interestingly enough, Ivanovitch echoes Mikulin who warns that "abstention, reserve, in certain situations, come very near to political crime" (294).

paradoxical enough that she is a millionaire aristocrat whose life used to be notorious for "its intrigues, lawsuits, favours, disgrace, expulsions, its atmosphere of scandal, occultism, and charlatanism" (163). Her revolutionary activity is no more than a way of personal hatred for "only one family" by whom she was disgraced:

As to extirpating ... there is only one class in Russia which must be extirpated. Only one. And that class consists of only one family. ... That one family must be extirpated. (222)

She does not realize that she herself still belongs to that "class." As Boyle argues, "it is not the oppressors of the Russian peasantry against whom she rails, but the 'thieves' who have spoiled her family estates."⁴⁰ She does not even think of spending her fortune for revolutionary activities. It is no wonder that she leaves no money to Peter Ivanovitch, dying "without making a will" (381).

If the characters like Natalia, Sophia Antonovna, and Haldin partly represent something "noble, humane, and devoted" in revolutionism, Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S. represent something "narrow-minded" and "hypocritical." The narrator's lengthy characterization of revolution is worthy to note here:

⁴⁰Boyle, *Symbol and Meaning* 214.

[I]n a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. ... The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement--but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment--often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured--that is the definition of revolutionary success. There have been in every revolution hearts broken by such successes. (134-5)

The narrator does not deny that there may be a genuine revolution that begins with "the unselfish and the intelligent." Yet during the process they lose their passion and become disillusioned and even disgusted, for the worst characters take them over. The narrator's view is very much like Edmund Burke's: "Every revolution contains in it something of evil."⁴¹ Conrad knew that "Turning and turning in the widening gyre"

⁴¹Bredvold and Ross, ed., *The Philosophy of Edmund Burke: A Selection from His Speeches and Writings* 41. Burke had a lot to say against French Revolution which, with Robespierre as leader, ultimately led to the Reign of Terror in 1793-94. "Prudence" is for Burke a political virtue.

(Yeats's phrase) the best are easily victimized by the worst. The novel seems to make it clear that the ultimate result of revolution is, ironically enough, a betrayal of both hopes and ideals.⁴²

5

It is significant that the whole event of the novel is presented through the narrator's "western eyes." As Schwarz observes, the language teacher is "the epitome of morality and sanity."⁴³ The narrator ceaselessly tries to find out truth behind all the futilities of Russian politics. Razumov's diary gives the narrator an access to the psychology of Russians. He succeeds in shaping Razumov's tormented record into a coherent narrative. As the narrator in *The Secret Agent* gives a shape to the anarchic futility, the language teacher in *Under Western Eyes* provides a "form" to the almost formless, lawless world of autocracy and revolutionism. He knows that a form is something important in art as well as in life:

⁴²In *Politics*, Howe is severely critical of the passage which, he thinks, indicates "Conrad's own bias." According to him, Conrad "reduces history to a cycle of enforced repetition and frees us, conveniently, from the need to study either specific revolutions or their complex consequences" (92). Howe does not find any affirmative value in Conrad's skepticism but the "debris of failure" (84).

⁴³Schwarz, *Almayer's Folly to Under Western Eyes* 211. See also 195-211. In *Politics*, Howe, however, assesses (mistakenly, I think) the language teacher as follows: "The narrator is not simply an awkward intrusion: he signifies a wish on Conrad's part to dissociate himself from his own imagination" (91-2).

[W]hat all men are really after is some form or perhaps only some formula of peace. (5)

The narrator knows that the form can be made by using language, for "There must be a wonderful soothing power in mere words" (5).

The language teacher does not seek a form for its sake. The narrator's task is to provide a right form through which one is able to discover the "moral conditions." By its "soothing power" the right language would be able to help "the moral discovery." The writer has to find a "key-word which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale" (67). It is no wonder why the language teacher "turn[s] over the hundreth time the leaves of Mr. Razumov's record" (67). The narrator's ceaseless attempt to find out the "key-word" is very much like Conrad's own: "Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world."⁴⁴ If not charged with "the right word and the right accent," the language may join, the narrator warns, "the great foes of reality" (3).

⁴⁴Conrad, *A Personal Record* xiv.

Chapter VI

Victory

One writes out of one's moral sense; for the race, as it were.

D.H. Lawrence

A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life; a poetry of indifference toward moral ideas is a poetry of indifference toward life.

Matthew Arnold

1

Conrad's exploration of betrayal culminates in *Victory* (1915). It is a climactic work in the sense that it not only deals with the most delicate form of betrayal--Heyst's philosophical betrayal--but also solidifies Conrad's moral imagination by showing, to use Leavis's words, "a victory over skepticism, a victory of life."¹

As Conrad says in his Author's Note, the novel "was finished in 1914 long before the murder of an Austrian Archduke sounded the first note of warning for a world already full of doubts and fears" (ix). The title itself seems to evoke a warlike context. Gillon, for instance, suggests that the title "represents not merely Lena's ambivalent victory but also the

¹Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 202.

dubious victory scored by the Allies in World War I."² Karl also sees the "social and political implications" and thinks of *Victory* as a "prophetic novel" in which "Heyst's trouble on the island amid the violence of the predatory Jones and Ricardo is, so to speak, his own world war."³ Whether one agrees with these critics there is no doubt that Conrad attempted to portray an "age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel" (3). Schomberg's shady hotel with its male customers can be a perfect "objective correlative" for the age. So is Heyst's "infernal mistrust of all life" (406). Conrad's moral imagination portrays not only the travellers' participation in the act of betrayals in Schomberg's hotel but also Heyst's betrayal of humanity. With its vivid characterization of betrayals surrounding Schomberg's hotel, *Victory* surely deserves to be, to use Leavis's phrase, "among those of Conrad's works which deserve to be current as representing his claim to classical standing."⁴

2

A discussion of Heyst's betrayal should be preceded by that of his

²Gillon, *Joseph Conrad* 150.

³Karl, *Reader's Guide* 246-7.

⁴Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 209.

father's, since Heyst's life has been immensely influenced and even dominated by his father's negative philosophy. Heyst Senior is described as the "destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs" (175). He maintains that because futility hovers over all human action, there is nothing worth doing in the world. If one is "clear-sighted" one should be able to see "the universal nothingness" (219). He even thinks that the world is "a factory and all mankind workmen in it" and that they are "paid in counterfeit money" (195-6). The best "defence against life" is, then, to "Look on--make no sound" (92, 175). Heyst Senior's deadly pessimism is somewhat reminiscent of the earlier Conrad who thought of the universe as "the knitting machine" where "there is no morality, no knowledge and no hope" and which "knits us in" and "knits us out."⁵ One should be able to see that the earlier Conrad more or less indulged himself in an excessive skepticism.

Heyst Senior's audacious creed of "the universal nothingness" should be seen as an act of betrayal, for by preaching the meaninglessness of life he loses or deliberately discards his own humanity. His philosophy is not that of life but that of death. Instead of preaching the efficacy of human love, he chooses to destroy the life-enhancing values like love, hope, and faith.

⁵Watts, ed., *Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham* 56-7, 70-1.

The most damaging aspect of his betrayal is that it literally dictates his son's life. Heyst acknowledges that his father is largely "responsible for what [his] existence is, or rather has been":

I don't know how many minds he convinced. But my mind was very young then, and youth I suppose can be easily seduced--even by negation. He was very *ruthless*. ... He dominated me without difficulty. (*Italics added*) (195-6)

Heyst was only eighteen years old when his "ruthless" father taught him the meaninglessness of life. The "companionship at that plastic and impressionable age" was "bound to leave in the boy a profound mistrust of life" (91).

It should be noted, however, that Heyst Senior is not entirely "responsible" for Heyst's drifting life. Heyst Senior's betrayal of humanity was certainly a decisive factor for determining Heyst's fate, but one should not ignore Heyst's own responsibility either. Even though one takes into account his father's "irresistible" influence, one should be troubled by the fact that Heyst slavishly practices his father's philosophy of detachment without reasoning. In other words, Heyst Senior initiates Heyst's view of life and Heyst feeds it without his own judgment. He merely chooses to be a good disciple of his father, deciding to "drift ... like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable

trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything" (92). To make his life "a masterpiece of aloofness" (174), he opts to live alone in Samburan, the "Round Island," and thereby ignores the importance of human relationship. He thinks and acts "as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas" (3-4). For him, the world is no more than "a bad dog" that "will bite you if you give it a chance" (57).

Heyst's willful alienation, however, is incomplete and paradoxical, for he, Conradian Crusoe, suffers from a "sense of loneliness."⁶ He is even "hurt" by the fact that "Not a single soul belonging to him lived anywhere on earth" (66). Considering his determination "to retire from the world in hermit fashion," his "painful" sense of solitude is a contradiction. One should bear in mind that Heyst experienced no close relationship with any one other than his father. Heyst never knew his mother (91). It is perhaps significant to note, as Meyer perceives, that many of Conrad's heroes, like the author himself, are "bereft of [their mothers] at an early age."⁷

⁶For an intriguing analogy between Heyst and Crusoe, see G.W. Kennedy's "Conrad and Robinson Crusoe," *Conradiana* 10.2 (1978): 113-21. Kennedy observes: "Conrad is hostile to most of the values that *Robinson Crusoe* and its author seem to represent" (113).

⁷Meyer, *Joseph Conrad* 267-9. Calling one's attention to Apollo Korzeniowski's influence over Conrad, Meyer notes that "The father nearly always outlives his wife and hence plays a far more influential role in the life and development of the child."

Heyst's relationship with Morrison is similarly paradoxical. Despite his belief that "he who forms a tie is lost" (199-200), Heyst offers his money to Morrison who is about to lose his brig by "the conspiracy of two miserable Portuguese half-castes." His benevolence in helping Morrison shows something humane in his nature that is theoretically in conflict with his philosophy of detachment:

The Swede was as much distressed as Morrison; for he understood the other's feelings perfectly. No decent feeling was ever scorned by Heyst. (18)

What is troublesome, however, is that he considers his benevolence "harmful":

I suppose I have done a certain amount of harm, since I allowed myself to be tempted into action. It seemed innocent enough, but all action is bound to be harmful. It is devilish. That is why this world is evil upon the whole. (54)

Here, he is not only talking about his rescue of Morrison but also referring to his rescue of Lena. It is futility, he thinks, that is behind all human action. Such futilities are bound to swallow any humane action because "this world is evil upon the whole."

The "man of universal detachment" thinks that he has nothing to do with the outside world and that he is "above the level of island gossip" (206). But he is "hurt" when he hears that people speak ill of him: "Strange that it should hurt me!" (208). There is, of course, no truth in the "island gossip" that "the spider" (Heyst) caught "the fly" (Morrison) in the web (20). Schomberg, the malignant innkeeper, "hatch[es] that pretty tale" (211) and spreads it to others. Heyst exaggerates his feeling:

[T]his earth must be the appointed hatching planet of calumny enough to furnish the whole universe. I feel a disgust at my own person, as if I had tumbled into some filthy hole. (215)

At this point, he seems to forget his father's lesson: "Look on--make no sound" (175). Perhaps there is a difference between Heyst and his father. Heyst Senior believed in nothing and preached "the universal nothingness" whereas Heyst perceives the earth to be "the appointed hatching planet of calumny." It is not life's meaninglessness but its malignance and calumny that Heyst has in mind. Life signifies for Heyst Senior nothing, and for Heyst something like a "filthy hole" in which he feels "a disgust" even at himself.

Heyst's relationship with Lena also has to do with his paradoxical attitude toward life. Heyst, on the one hand, shows his humane concern

for Lena's predicament and finally rescues her. As Morrison's predicament arouses Heyst's benevolence, so does Lena's. At the same time, he thinks of his action as meaningless and futile.

There is no doubt that Heyst's "pity" is genuinely humane. He alone feels "a sudden pity" not only for Lena but also for other women of the orchestra who have been "exploited, hopeless, devoid of charm and grace" and "whose fate of cheerless dependence invested their coarse and joyless features with a touch of pathos" (70). As he watches Zangiaco's wife "pinch" Lena (because of her refusal to entertain the male audience), he asks Lena whether he could be of any use: "Pray command me" (73). It seems that Heyst, at the moment, completely forgets his philosophy of detachment. He even feels "the awakening of a tenderness ... towards an unknown woman" (82).

Lena, in turn, finds some hope in Heyst whose civil and gentlemanly attitude she has never found in other men. Because Heyst cares for her, she feels that she can now "stand up" for herself to "face" the "hungry" hotelkeeper. It is important to bear in mind that one of her names is Magdalen. The biblical Magdalen, of course, is a prostitute who becomes redeemed through Christ's forgiving grace. It is not unlikely that Lena, like Magdalen, has been forced to entertain male "customers." As she says, she is "not what they call a good girl" (198). Conrad, of course, does not stretch his story to the point in which the biblical story could be literally applied. Lena's fate is very much like Magdalen's yet Heyst,

obviously, is too human, too flawed to be compared with Christ.⁸

There is something agonizing in Lena's family background. She is "almost a child of the streets." Like Heyst who did not know of his mother, Lena hardly knew of her mother because her "mother ran away when she was little" (78). Because of her mother's betrayal, she and her father had to live a miserable life which was "the hopeless grip of poverty all the time." Her irresponsible father immersed himself in the grief and "used to get drunk" because he was "unable to forget his fugitive wife." So she ended up by becoming a member of the wandering orchestra.

Lena asks Heyst to give her a new name so that she could "forget everything that has gone before, as one forgets a dream that's done with, fright and all" (88). Before she met Heyst it did not "matter" how she was called:

I've never wished to forget anything till you came up to me that night and looked me through and through. (88)

Knowing that she now has Heyst's "moral support," she wants to "make a new start." A fresh name other than Alma or Magdalen would serve the

⁸Nevertheless, Meyer draws a somewhat excessive analogy between Heyst and Christ, saying that Lena "attains an ultimate state of grace through the redeeming action of Heyst (which rhymes with Christ)." See *Joseph Conrad* 352.

new life. As the sinful Magdalen wants to be reborn through Christ's healing power, Lena wants to be purified of her painful past through Heyst's generosity and love. Heyst gives her a new name, "Lena" (186).⁹

Yet Lena's wish for a new start gets discouraged soon, for Heyst never discards his lifelong skepticism. He is afraid of establishing "a tie" with her and even thinks that his rescue of Lena (as well as of Morrison) is a "corruption" (200). Action means for him "[t]he barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations" (174). He even despises "the physical sensation" that he feels for Lena, since he values his father's teaching over Lena's love:

Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love--
the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams. (219)

Lena acutely senses Heyst's inability and unwillingness to return her love, as she says:

⁹In *Joseph Conrad*, Meyer believes that Lena's name comes from *Evelina*, Conrad's mother (51). Tony Tanner notes that the name of Alma appears in Spenser's *Fairie Queene* and represents "the virgin soul and the Lady of the House of Temperance." Tanner also notes that Lena's name is "an amalgamation of fragments from both names [Magdalen and Alma]." See *L'Epoque Conradienne* (May 1981): 52. Quoted by Watts, in "Reflections on Victory," *Conradiana* xv.1 (1983): 75.

You should try to love me! ... It's you who have been good, helpful and tender to me. Perhaps you love me for that--just for that; or perhaps you love me for company, and because--well! But for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever. ... Do try! (221)

It is true, as Lena says, that Heyst has been "good, helpful and tender" to her. But it is also true that he does not go beyond that level. As Lena later says, she has "been for him only a violent and sincere choice of curiosity and pity--a thing that passes" (394).

Considering Heyst's inability to return Lena's love, Lena's affirmative love should be truly appreciated. She understands that "whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him" (298). Even though she may be for him "a thing that passes," she knows that he means everything to her:

Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all? (187)

Unlike Heyst, Lena knows the importance of human love. "I only wish," she tells Heyst, "I could give you something more, or better, or whatever it is you want" (211). If the world comes to an end, she will "be sorry for the happy people in it." Heyst, on the other hand, would not be sorry

for the "vision of a world destroyed" (191), since there is nothing to "be sorry" about in the world where evil alone prevails. He would be rather gratified if the world, full of human follies and evils, came to an end.

Unlike "the man of universal scorn and unbelief," Lena maintains "the faith in the man of her destiny, and perhaps in the Heaven which had sent him so wonderfully to cross her path" (292). Such a faith has been born in her since she met Heyst. She used to be the woman who did not care for anything. The "moral support" she receives from Heyst now makes her a different person. She knows that she is "a human being who counted" (292). Her faith represents one of the most important values in Conrad's moral universe. In this respect, Lena becomes a foil to Heyst whose fate more or less resembles Decoud's. Heyst and Decoud (*Nostramo*) have something in common--intellectual audacity to mistrust life. The lack of "faith in himself and others" is the direct cause of Decoud's death. So is Heyst's tragic fate. Conrad's moral imagination as such gives primal importance to the faith.

Sometimes, Lena appears to be too naive. She even wonders whether the diabolic trio's invasion of Samburan is "a sort of punishment" for her "guilty life." She has a notion that it has been "a sin to throw herself into [Heyst's] arms" (394):

It was the way they lived together--that wasn't right, was it? It was a guilty life. For she had not been forced into it, driven, scared

into it. No, no--she had come to him of her own free will, with her whole soul yearning unlawfully. (354)

She literally believes a stereotyped myth in Western civilization:

Woman is the tempter. You took me up from pity. I threw myself at you. (354)

Lena's view of her "unlawful" love for Heyst is too simple-minded. But one should be able to detect that Heyst's inability to return her love has a lot to do with her deep anxiety and self-consciousness. Had he shown his true love for her, she would not have felt that she committed a "sin" by loving him. It is not to say that Lena reproaches Heyst. On the contrary, she blames nobody but herself. However naïve and misguided, Lena's consciousness of "sin" has something humane that Heyst never shows. He asks Lena almost cynically:

Are you conscious of sin? ... For I am not ... before Heaven, I am not! (354)

Heyst does not realize that his contemptuous attitude towards life constitutes a sin or, in other words, a betrayal of humanity. Arrogance characterizes Heyst, and humility, Lena. In the figurative sense, the

satanic trio can be regarded as a "sort of retribution from an angry heaven" for Heyst's "sin" (354).

Heyst's lack of faith also determines his response to the evil figures like Jones, Ricardo and Pedro. He perceives that they embody "evil intelligence," "instinctive savagery" and the "brute force" (29). Yet he shows no determination to fight against evil:

And they persist. That's the worst of it--they persist. They have no right to be--but they are. They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time--anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust. (329-30)

Heyst rightly sees that evils "persist" even though they "have no right to be." What is troublesome, however, is that he feels nothing but "disgust" towards such evils. Nausea or disgust alone is not an effective shield against evils. One should fight against evils, but it is doubtful whether even if Wang had not stolen the revolver Heyst would have used it against "evil intelligence":

There is a strain in me which lays me under an intense obligation to avoid even the appearance of murder. I have never pulled a trigger or lifted my hand on a man, even in self-defence. (329)

Heyst's problem is that he is unable to give a value to any of his action. Any action would be futile, for "the universal nothingness" prevails in the world. As Geddes notes, "Heyst, like Hamlet and that much-reduced Hamlet of the twentieth century, Prufrock, suffers from indecision."¹⁰

Regardless of Heyst's unwillingness to use any weapon, Wang's theft of Heyst's revolver is inexcusable. By stealing his boss's revolver Wang betrays a work ethic--the "community of two" (180). Wang as a servant is supposed to be loyal to Heyst. Instead of protecting his master, Wang robs him of his only weapon and thereby leaves his master and his mistress defenseless. Of course Heyst's preoccupied detachment makes any human touch or communication between them difficult and almost impossible. But Wang, too, is responsible for his "almost automatic" relationship with his master. Wang "gave no more than he got" and "would [even] make his master pay for the vegetables which he was raising to satisfy his instinct" (181). One cannot find any warmth between Heyst and Wang. They hardly talk to each other. Wang has "neither love nor dislike" for Heyst (307). Heyst is called "Number One" because he used to be the manager of the coal company in which Wang served as a coolie.¹¹ "Number One" hardly sounds like a human name or

¹⁰Gary Geddes, *Conrad's Later Novels* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1980) 60. Also, one may recall the Consul's inability to love or act in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*.

¹¹Boyle thinks that "The epithet ["Number One"] which Wang applies to Heyst ... establish[es] the ruler of Samburan [Heyst] as an archetype of the first man [Adam]." See *Symbol and Meaning*, 235.

title.

The trio's arrival in Samburan prompts Wang to steal his master's revolver because he senses the terror and danger around the island. Pretending that he is "velly sick [*sic*]" (311), Wang goes away from Heyst. What makes Wang really unforgivable is not his theft or his deceitful retreat from his master but his adamant refusal of Heyst's request that Lena "stay with the Orang Kaya's women for a few days" (348). Wang forbids Heyst and Lena from passing the "barricade of felled trees," for he believes (perhaps rightly) that they "should be pursued [by the evil trio]" (347). Heyst later tells Lena:

[Wang] gave me to understand that he would shoot me with my own revolver without any sort of compunction, rather than risk a rude and distasteful contest with the strange barbarians for my sake. (347)

One may understand Wang's determination to protect the Alfuro village from which "men are away in trading vessels" and "only women and children and a few old fellows are left." What makes him callous and hollow, however, is his careless posture toward Heyst and Lena. He has no understanding that the safety of Heyst and Lena is as important as that of the village folks. One wonders whether, as Captain Davidson says, Wang is really "not a bad Chinaman" (411). Wang claims that after

he refused Heyst's request he "followed Heyst and the girl through the forest from pity, and partly out of curiosity" (411). Wang's "pity," however, seems to be no more than lip service and does not change the fact that he made his master and mistress more defenseless and more hopeless. It is not exaggerating to suggest that Wang, like the trio, is responsible for the tragic fate of Heyst and Lena. Wang's survival may not mean much, for it is no more than a moral death. There is no way whatsoever that Conrad would ever embrace Wang's selfish, solipsistic way of life.¹²

The helplessness that Heyst feels under the spell of evil never gets into Lena's mind. She sees evil hanging over Samburan yet is, unlike Heyst, determined to fight against it. Ricardo is for her "the embodied evil of the world"--"an unavoidable presence, which had attended all her life" (298). Unlike Heyst, Lena is determined to battle the "evil of the world." She does not immerse herself in philosophical reasoning. She knows that "whether Heyst loved her or not she loved him" and that "she had brought this [danger] on his head" (298). She is armed with her love, her strong sense of responsibility and her "faith in the man of her destiny." She would protect Heyst against the evil that the figure of Ricardo represents. If necessary, she is willing to sacrifice her own life.

¹²William W. Bonney, however, thinks that Conrad affirms Wang by allowing him to live where Heyst fails. Bonney goes a step further: Conrad establishes the bleak ontology in terms of which *Victory* must be read, and validates the detachment." See his "Narrative Perspective in *Victory*: The Thematic Relevance," *Critical Essays*, ed. Billy, 140. See also 128-41.

However naive, Lena's strong will to save Heyst's life even at the cost of her own is noble enough. She sees "only her purpose of capturing death--savage, sudden, irresponsible death, prowling round the man who possessed her; death embodied in the knife ready to strike into his heart" (394). Ricardo's knife is for her "the mark and sign of stalking death" (395).¹³

By taking away from Ricardo "the very sting of death in the service of love" (405), she believes that she "saved" Heyst:

Oh, my beloved, ... I've saved you! ... Who else could have done for you? (406)

Lena's claim that she "saved" Heyst is not literally fitting. Baines notes that "her 'victory', though absolutely real to her, has no objective reality."¹⁴ Jones has the gun and the danger is still hovering over Heyst. Nonetheless, one should be able to catch the deeper meaning from her claim of "victory." Wiley argues that by "depriving Ricardo of his knife" Lena asserts "woman's competence to perform her life-task" and at the

¹³See Meyer's *Joseph Conrad* 232. Meyer thinks of the knife as the phallic symbol. According to him, by taking Ricardo's knife, Lena emasculates him. See also Rieselbach's *Conrad's Rebels* 132. She also thinks of the knife as a phallic symbol and therefore contends that Lena's death is "the result of a symbolically sexual encounter." However ingenious, both critics go too far and thereby seem to dehumanize Conrad's novel.

¹⁴Baines, *Joseph Conrad* 396.

same time rejects "the idea of her subservience to evil."¹⁵ Lena may not save Heyst's life but Heyst is spiritually saved through her self-sacrifice and love. Affirmation triumphs over negation. Lena's victory is for Leavis "a victory over skepticism, a victory of life."¹⁶ Gurko puts it: "It is a victory of character over social station, of action over inertia, of will over misanthropy."¹⁷ Heyst was Lena's saviour when he rescued her. Now, Lena becomes his saviour. As Gillon notes, "Lena's death has finally made him realize the danger and the absurdity of his philosophy."¹⁸ In this respect, Heyst's agonizing and tragic cry is a supreme eulogy on Lena's affirmation of life:

[W]oe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust in life! (41)

Heyst testifies that he has been wrong in his mistrust and contempt of life and that Lena has been right in her trust of life. His knowledge comes too late, though, not to be tragic.

¹⁵Wiley, *Conrad's Measure of Man* 157. Indeed, Lena used to think of her as "the tempter."

¹⁶Leavis, *The Great Tradition* 202.

¹⁷Gurko, *Joseph Conrad* 214-5.

¹⁸Gillon, *The Eternal Solitary* 140.

Heyst recognizes, to borrow Hawthorne's phrase, "[t]he sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man, and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims."¹⁹ By acknowledging that one should learn to "love," "hope" and "trust," Heyst, in a sense, repudiates his father's Schopenhauerian philosophy of "the universal nothingness."²⁰ His father taught him the meaninglessness of the universe and advised him to "drift" and "make no sound." At the final moment of his life, Heyst throws away his father's teaching and embraces the life-enhancing values such as hope, love and trust. In other words, he frees himself from his father and ultimately triumphs over his father. His life, which has been embedded in, say, a betrayal of humanity, becomes redeemed and his death "symbolizes his return to humanity."²¹ Victory is, then, not only Lena's but also Heyst's.²² If Heyst can be considered, as Schwarz argues, "a representative figure of an era lacking in moral energy and conviction,"²³ he ceases to be so at the very last moment of his life.

¹⁹Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Ethan Brand," *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Tales and Sketches* (New York: The Library of America, 1982) 1057.

²⁰Bonney, however, thinks (mistakenly) that the novel rather vindicates Old Heyst's detachment. See his "Narrative Perspective in *Victory*: The Thematic Relevance" 140.

²¹Gillon, *The Eternal Solitary* 140.

²²See Boyle's *Symbol and Meaning* 237. Boyle thinks that Heyst's "last words represent his victory." See also Robert F. Haugh's *Joseph Conrad: Discovery in Design* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1957) 116. Haugh notes: "Heyst has fashioned a triumphant victory, a victory over his own cold heart."

²³Schwarz, *The Later Fiction* 66.

One may think that Heyst "cannot profit from his discovered wisdom and [therefore] performs the conclusive act of renunciation of life by killing himself."²⁴ Or one may wonder whether "to survive and face up to things may be the nobler path."²⁵ However, one should never fail to notice that we as readers "profit" from Heyst's failure and his final self-knowledge. As Brodie notes, "Heyst's end may be physical death, but we may see in it not only the intimation of despair but also a suggestion of spiritual revelation. For, in embracing death Heyst affirms the emptiness of life without hope, love and trust."²⁶ One therefore wonders whether Heyst's fall is a *felix culpa*.

3

To Heyst's question whether she could not "defend yourself somehow," Lena answers:

I tell you they are too many for me. (79)

By "they" Lena means "black men" who are ruthless and always ready to

²⁴Baines, *Joseph Conrad* 397.

²⁵Batchelor, *Lord Jim* 170.

²⁶Brodie, "Conrad's Feminine Perspective" 148.

exploit helpless creatures like her. "They" are conscienceless and remorseless. As Lena says, "they" are too powerful and "too many" for a helpless person like her to fight against. The novel presents many of "them." "They" deliberately ruin others' lives sometimes by their malevolent talking or malicious activity. "They" are utterly devoid of humanity and betray everything about humanity.

Schomberg is clearly one of "them." The hotelkeeper "prowled round [Lena], mute, hungry, portentous behind his great beard, or else assailed her in quiet corners and empty passages with deep, mysterious murmurs from behind" (79). He is, to use Geddes's phrase, "a lecher with a ravenous appetite for Lena's body."²⁷ It is no wonder that "The contrast of Heyst's quiet, polished manner gave her special delight and filled her with admiration" (79). Unlike other women in the orchestra, Lena is young and attractive enough to arouse Schomberg's lust. He even wants to strike a bargain with Lena:

We'll soon get rid of the old woman [Mrs. Schomberg]. ... Hang her! I've never cared for her. ... I shall tell her to go to her people in Europe. She will have to go, too! I will see to it. ... And then we shall sell this hotel and start another somewhere else. (94)

²⁷Geddes, *Conrad's Later Novels* 71.

Lena is for Schomberg, to use Walter de la Mare's phrase, "like a ripe fruit, not only ready to drop into his mouth, but which would prove a delicious antidote to the extremely dry distaste for his battered, fear-besotted wife."²⁸

He will gladly discard his wife if Lena agrees to live with him, "a man of substance." His wife is for him no more than "an It--an automaton, a very plain dummy" that can be eliminated at any time (40). Later, he even encourages Ricardo to eliminate her: "I wish you would carry her off with you somewhere to the devil! I wouldn't run after you" (114). Schomberg's loveless, brutal relationship with his defenseless wife is perhaps a good example of what Martin Buber called "I-It."²⁹

As Zangiacomo says, it is Schomberg who insists that "the artists should go about the audience during the interval" (48). Schomberg wants to promote his business by letting the women performers entertain his male customers. It is not difficult to surmise that the sexual relationship between the female entertainers and the male customers is subtly encouraged. The music that the Zangiacomo band plays also tells something about the nature of the business. As Heyst sharply observes, there is in their music "a suggestion of brutality--something cruel, sensual

²⁸Sherry, ed., *Conrad: The Critical Heritage* 291. Walter de la Mare's review was published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30 September 1915.

²⁹In his famous book *I and Thou*, Buber distinguished "I-Thou" from "I-It." He stressed the danger of the "I-It" relationship in which people fail to enter relation. Failure to enter dialogue and relation between man and man was for him "evil."

and repulsive":

The Zangiacomo band was not making music; it was simply murdering silence with a vulgar, ferocious energy. (68)

Heyst feels "as if witnessing a deed of violence" (68-9). Their music is beyond human decency and primarily appeals to the male audience's sexual instinct so that Schomberg's business can flourish. There is no doubt that the women "artists" will be the target of the male audience's "energy." Conrad here is showing how far art could go when it exploits the base instinct. Zangiacomo's music is, to borrow Henry James's phrase, "a betrayal of a sacred office."³⁰

The hotel is the hatching place of calumny in which Schomberg fabricates truth and spreads his lies to others. Heyst's only "crime" is that he "had not paid perhaps three visits altogether to [Schomberg's hotel]" (26, 27). Schomberg, for example, calls Heyst "the spider" who is "sucking" Morrison "the fly" (20). Heyst is also called "vagabond, imposter, swindler, ruffian, *schwein-hund*" (47). Schomberg's slander is contagious like a deadly disease, for a great number of people join him and begin to call Heyst "the Spider" (21). Truth disappears and mere calumny takes over. Heyst recognizes "the power of calumny," as he tells

³⁰Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," *Selected Criticism: Henry James* ed. Morris Shapira (New York: McGraw, 1965) 51.

Lena:

Perhaps you wouldn't [believe]--not at first, at any rate; but the power of calumny grows with time. It's insidious and penetrating. It can even destroy one's faith in oneself--dry-rot the soul. (362)

Of course, Heyst is exaggerating as he thinks of the earth as "the appointed hatching planet of calumny" (215). Yet one can imagine Heyst's anger and disgust when he hears from Lena Schomberg's slander that "Morrison's partner [Heyst] first got all there was to get out of him, and then ... sent him out to die somewhere" (208). Instead of making Morrison die, Heyst saved him. Morrison's death, of course, has nothing to do with Heyst; the former went to England of his own will and died there because of the weather. Schomberg keeps repeating his version of the story which, as time goes on, usurps the place of truth. Even Lena is, though only for a moment, vulnerable to Schomberg's outrageous lie. As she hears the name of Morrison she shows "something like an expression of horror on her face" (205). She also wonders whether if Heyst "should grow weary of the burden" her fate would be like Morrison's. (Her doubt disappears soon, though.) It is also through Schomberg's outrageous lie that the diabolic trio think of a "treasure-hunting expedition" to the Samburan. Schomberg is largely responsible for the tragic ending of Lena and Heyst, although Heyst himself spins his fate out of his deplorable

unbelief and scorn for life.

If Schomberg is one of the most pernicious betrayers in the novel, his male customers also play a conspiratorial role and, like him, betray humanity. They are ready to believe the innkeeper's fabricated tale of Heyst, as the narrator tells us:

Human nature being what it is, having a silly side to it as well as a mean side, there were not a few who pretended to be indignant on no better authority than a general propensity to believe every evil report; and a good many others who found it simply funny to call Heyst the Spider--behind his back of course. (21)

If they had protested against Schomberg's malignant defamation of Heyst he would have ceased to "hatch" any more tales. They, however, are insensitive to human decency and always willing to believe "every evil report."

The male audience's participation in Schomberg's slander against Heyst has something to do with self-interest. They resent the presence of the Tropical Belt Coal Co. of which Heyst happens to be manager. The Tropical Belt Coal Co. means for them "the end of the individual trader," for they, unlike the company, "could not afford to buy steamers" (24). Schwarz argues that the company represents Western imperialism and that Heyst, therefore, is an imperialist who complacently believes that the

company means a "great stride forward for these regions" (6).³¹ It is, however, very unlikely that Heyst, a man of universal scorn and unbelief, really deludes himself into believing the efficacy of imperialism. One should also take into account that the Tropical Belt Coal Co. was not his idea but Morrison's. In a sense, he was forced to take the job as the manager of the company. People's resentment against him is therefore somewhat wrong-headed. Heyst is mistakenly perceived as "the destroyer of our little industry--Heyst the Enemy." They even exult over "Heyst the Enemy" as the company goes into liquidation. It is blind self-interest that makes them insensitive to Heyst's loss of his job as manager. (This is not to say that Heyst regrets having lost the job.)

It seems that Schomberg's customers, like the innkeeper himself, appear to be male chauvinists. They are "indifferent" to the misery and helplessness of the female "artists." In fact, they rather enjoy Zangiacomo's music in which "there [is] a suggestion of brutality--something cruel, sensual and repulsive" (68). Heyst observes:

[I]t seemed marvellous to see the people sitting so quietly on their chairs, drinking so calmly out of their glasses, and giving no signs of distress, anger or fear. (69)

³¹Schwarz, *The Later Fiction* 68.

They enjoy the women artists' service during the interval. It is also very likely that they may want a business transaction with the women.

Schomberg's chauvinistic customers actively participate in the gambling activity. With the forced permission of Schomberg, Jones and Ricardo turns the concert-hall into a house of gambling and ruthlessly exploit the greedy male customers of the hotel. The gamblers inside the hall form an inhumane spectacle:

In the middle, Mr. Jones, a starved spectre turned into a banker, faced Ricardo, a rather nasty, slow-moving cat turned into a croupier. By contrast, the other faces round that table, anything between twenty and thirty, must have looked like collected samples of intensely artless, helpless humanity--pathetic in their innocent watch for the small turns of luck which indeed might have been serious enough for them. (118)

They are, of course, the pre-destined victims of Ricardo and Jones, but it is important to bear in mind that they are victimized by their own greed as well. They have a lot in common with the dehumanized trio. With its repulsive music and greedy gambling hall, Schomberg's hotel embodies the hopeless betrayal of humanity or, to use Schwarz's phrase, the "grim

image of our age."³²

4

While Schomberg is dangerous and harmful in his calumny, Jones, Ricardo and Pedro are deadly in their ruthless violence. They are for Lena "the embodied evil of the world" and for Heyst "the envoys of the outer world"--an "evil intelligence" (298, 329). If the island of Samburan can be compared to an Eden in which Heyst-Adam and Lena-Eve live, the trio may represent Sin, Death, and Satan.³³ It is, of course, not to say that Conrad presents an allegory based on the Genesis myth. It would be far-fetched to point out one-to-one relationships between the Genesis myth and Conrad's story. Conrad makes one see that the fault lies not only "in other people," like the trio and Schomberg, but also in Heyst's wrong-headed detachment. The betrayal is portrayed as mutual, not one-sided. Moser, however, thinks that Conrad's later novels (of course including *Victory*) demonstrate that "[t]he fault lies elsewhere, in other people."³⁴ Meyer, too, argues that after the breakdown (1910), Conrad

³²Schwarz, *The Later Fiction* 78.

³³See Milton's *Paradise Lost* II.629-1055. Milton thinks that Sin, Death, and Satan parody God, the Son, Adam and Eve.

³⁴Moser, *Joseph Conrad* 140.

"could no longer afford [the] introspective journeys into the self" and therefore chose to "confine his art to the surface of life."³⁵ These critics, however, fail to see that Conrad surely demonstrates and recognizes a "heart of darkness" or evil in Heyst's incorrigible belief in "the universal nothingness." As Najder puts it, "nobody can doubt that the essential philosophical and moral conflict takes place in Axel Heyst's mind."³⁶

As Heyst notes, the satanic trio "have no right to be--but they are" (329). They "persist." The trio's profession is plundering, as the corpse-like Jones plainly tells Heyst:

We are--er--adequate bandits; and we are after the fruit of your labours as a--er--successful swindler. It's the way of the world--gorge and disgorge! (384)

They are always after somebody's "fruit." If somebody is in their way, they resort to violence and murder. As Ricardo tells Jones, there is for them "no such thing as conscience" (264). They even "have no feelings" (133).

Jones, the head of the gang, resembles death itself. He looks "like

³⁵Meyer, *Joseph Conrad* 243. In *Conrad the Novelist*, Guerard agrees with Moser and Meyer. Guerard's criticism seems to lose the balance particularly in its almost biting, narrow-minded tone: *Victory* is "one of the worst novels" (272) and "Conrad for the high schools and the motion pictures, the easiest and generically the most popular of the novels" (255).

³⁶Najder, *Joseph Conrad* 164.

a corpse." He belongs to the world of darkness so that he cannot even stand the light and closes "his eyes wearily, as if the light hurt them" (112). His "lifeless" look easily terrifies even the diabolic figure like Schomberg. Considering his death-like appearance, Jones's misogyny comes as no surprise. One critic observes: "The force in Jones is all negative, and this is why he hates and fears women, for they are fertility and the literal 'source of life.'³⁷ "Women," Jones thinks, "are a perfect curse" (102). The "governor funks," Ricardo says, "facing women" because they are "in the way" and "[m]ake a noise, if nothing else" (160, 161). When Jones finds out that Heyst lives with Lena, he feels nausea and breathlessly calls Heyst "woman-ridden hermit" and "man in the moon, that can't exist without [a woman]" (387). Jones gets further disgusted as he actually watches Ricardo kissing Lena's sandals. He tells Heyst:

Can there be a more disgusting spectacle? It's enough to make the earth detestable. ... If I have to shoot you in the end, then perhaps you will die cured. (391)

It seems that Jones's misogyny has something to do with Lena's death. He, of course, mistakenly shoots Lena. His killing of Lena, however, is

³⁷Sister Mary Rosaline Kisner, A.S.C., "The Abyss for the Hollow Man: Conrad's Notion of Evil," *Conradiana* ii.3 (Spring 1969-70): 94.

not quite as accidental as it appears, for his misogyny has always been seeking to eliminate, to use his own expression, "a perfect curse" (102).

There is no doubt that Conrad thought of Jones's misogyny as a betrayal of humanity. Critics (like Guerard, Meyer, Moser, Cox, and many others), who accuse Conrad of being a misogynist, do not recognize that misogyny is perceived as a betrayal in Conrad's artistic world. Furthermore, it should be noted that women characters such as Emilia Gould (*Nostromo*), Nathalie Haldin and Tekla (*Under Western Eyes*), and Lena (*Victory*) are often playing more important and more affirmative roles than their male counterparts.³⁸ Had Conrad been a misogynist he would not have made his women characters prominent enough to represent the novel's moral center. Brodie seems to assess Conrad's attitude towards women quite accurately: "In their talent for sympathetic intuition and in their emphasis on the value and responsibilities of human relationships, the majority of Conrad's women act as vehicles for the enlightenment of others [male characters], introducing them to the realm of emotional warmth and responsiveness in which life's mysteries and treasures may be discovered."³⁹

³⁸Karl is not mistaken in thinking that Emilia Gould, for example, "is first in a line of sensitive and feeling twentieth-century women who are the opposites of their materialistic husbands; she foreruns, for example, Mrs. Ramsay (*To the Lighthouse*), Lady Chatterley, Mrs. Dalloway, Mrs. Moore (*A Passage to India*), and Mrs. Wilcox (*Howards End*), without manifesting their non-intellectual smugness." See *Reader's Guide* 61.

³⁹Brodie, "Conrad's Feminine Perspective" 151-2. Brodie also notes that "For Conrad, masculine ideals tend to reveal an undercurrent of egoism, a self-involvement and self-centeredness notably absent in the feminine counterpart" (143). See also 141-54.

It is not misogyny alone that characterizes Jones's betrayal of humanity. He betrays every established human code. He and Ricardo, for example, plunder their skipper's cash. A ship is a microcosm of human society in the Conradian universe, as Conrad makes it clear in an essay:

The ship, this ship, our ship, the ship we serve, is *the moral symbol of our life*. A ship has to be respected, actually and ideally; her merit, her innocence, are *sacred* things. Of all the creations of man she is the closest partner of his toil and courage. From every point of view it is imperative that you should do well by her. And, as always in the case of true love, all you can do for her adds only to the tale of her merits in your heart. Mute and compelling, she claims not only your *fidelity*, but your *respect*. (Italics added)⁴⁰

By the same token, the captain of the ship is to be respected and obeyed. The captain, like the ship, "claims not only your fidelity, but your respect." This fundamental ethical norm is hopelessly violated by Jones and his "secretary." To one's horror, they are even ready to kill their captain. They do not mind "being one life more or less on this earth" (137). It is luck alone that saves the captain, for he does not move while Jones is plundering his cash-box; otherwise, Ricardo would have finished

⁴⁰Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 188-9.

him off with his deadly knife.

It is not surprising that Jones defines himself to Heyst as "an outlaw":

I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit. In another sense I am an outcast--almost an outlaw. If you prefer a less materialistic view, I am a sort of fate--the retribution that waits its time. (379)

Jones perceives the world as a "great, wild jungle without law" (113). His is a Darwinian ethic: the strong eat the weak. Jones's claim that he is "the retribution that waits its time" is somewhat similar to Brown's claim (*Lord Jim*) that he is "the Scourge of God." Milton's Satan says more or less the same: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell."⁴¹

Jones, however, is grossly mistaken in believing that because Heyst plundered Morrison's money his plunder of Heyst would be "the retribution":

We pursue the same ends ... only perhaps I pursue them with more openness than you--with more simplicity. (320)

As with Brown's "sickening suggestion of common guilt," Jones suggests

⁴¹See *Paradise Lost* IV.75. This phrase is partially quoted by M.C. Bradbrook, in *Joseph Conrad: Poland's English Genius* (New York: Russell, 1965) 65.

that there is a lot in common between Heyst and him because they have the same purpose of plundering other's "fruit." There is, of course, no truth in his suggestion of "the same ends." Jones does not realize that Schomberg "hatched" a tale, until it is too late. True or false, he perhaps does not care, as long as he has "some sport out of [Heyst]" (336-7) and enjoys "the pleasure of defiance."⁴²

Unlike his "governor," Ricardo is not disgusted or terrified by women. He rather chases and hunts women. He is a perfect example of a male chauvinist. Women are for him no more than a sexual tool through which he can "liberate" his suppressed sexual energy:

Ravish or kill--it was all one to him, as long as by the act he liberated the suffering soul of savagery repressed for so long.
(288)

He has neither feelings nor conscience and is a perfect beast in a "great, wild jungle without law." He even boasts of his girl hunting:

Once I was courting a girl. I used to kiss her behind the ear and say to myself: "If you only knew who's kissing you, my dear, you would scream and bolt!" Ha! ha! Not that I wanted to do them

⁴²Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* 188.

any harm; but I felt the power in myself. (129)

The love-making is for Ricardo an effective way of showing off his "power." It does not matter whether the woman gets ravished or killed as long as he feels the "power" in himself. He, for instance, would have raped or murdered Lena had she not resisted so desperately and made him "crestfallen like a beast of prey that has missed its spring" (293).

A man's life is for Ricardo no more than that of a fly, as he tells Schomberg:

You are no more to me one way or another than that fly there.
Just so. I'd squash you or leave you alone. I don't care what I do.
(129)

He does not "care much for the notion of butchering a man [Pedro] bound hand and foot and fastened by the neck besides" (143). Leaving "one life more or less on this earth" does not matter to him. A human being becomes for the "secretary" an "It" that can be ruthlessly exploited and then discarded. Heyst's excessive claim that "[t]he world is a bad dog" can be true if one imagines the world filled with infernal figures like Ricardo, Jones and Pedro. Then, "[i]t will bite you if you give it a chance" (57).

Pedro resembles a beast more than a human being. Pedro is

actually called the governor's "dog." He is ready to do whatever the governor orders him to do. He, for instance, "could bring down an ox with his fist, at a word from the boss" (142). As Ricardo threatens Schomberg, he is not exaggerating at all:

And if I thought you had been to the police, I would tell Pedro to catch you round the waist and break your fat neck by jerking your head backward--*snap!* I saw him do it to a big buck nigger who was flourishing a razor in front of the governor. It can be done. You hear a low crack, that's all--and the man drops down like a limp rag. (152)

Before Ricardo's description of Pedro's brutality, even the satanic Schomberg collapses "as if indeed his moral neck had been broken--*snap!*" (153). Pedro's appearance alone is enough to terrify people. Wang, for instance, becomes terrified as he witnesses Pedro's "great fangs and ferocious growls" (311).

Pedro's physiognomy can be a perfect metaphor for the trio's betrayal of humanity, as the narrator describes it:

The lower part of his physiognomy was over-developed; his narrow and low forehead, unintelligently furrowed by horizontal wrinkles, surmounted wildly hirsute cheeks and a flat nose with

wide, baboon-like nostrils. *There was something equivocal in the appearance of his shaggy, hair-smothered humanity.* (Italics added) (99)

The trio indeed "smother" humanity, as if they were truly Sin, Death, and Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The novel effectively visualizes the "hair-smothered humanity" in the figure of Pedro.

One has to keep in mind that Pedro's brother, Antonio, has been killed by Jones and Ricardo. Actually, Jones shot Antonio to death, for Antonio and Pedro conspired to kill Jones and Ricardo with their sharpened knives. Jones and Ricardo "pushed and rolled [Antonio's body] into the creek, and left the rest to the alligators" (141). Ricardo benefits from Antonio's death, since he makes Antonio's sharp knife his own. The necessity of economy and convenience saved Pedro from being shot to death himself, for Jones, first, wanted to "save a cartridge" (141) and, secondly, thought that "the beggar would be useful in our way along the coast" (144).

5

It comes as a relief to see that the satanic trio get killed (though Schomberg and his company nevertheless remain intact). Ricardo's

betrayal of his "governor" becomes exposed and Jones therefore kills his "secretary." Pedro gets killed by Wang. It appears that the trio nevertheless accomplish their mission by destroying Heyst and Lena. The victory, however, is not theirs, for the infernal trio are unable to destroy the human spirit embodied in Lena and Heyst. Jones, Ricardo and Pedro come to no understanding of the human values because they are, to borrow Lawrence's phrase once more, "a gnawing little negation, gnawing at the roots of life."⁴³

Some critics have made too much out of the novel's final word "Nothing!" (412). Rieselbach, for example, takes the word at face value and thereby thinks that "we are left with a wasteland vision."⁴⁴ Davidson thinks that "nothing is redeemed [by Heyst's suicide]."⁴⁵ Baines also notes that the novel ends "on a note of despair."⁴⁶ These critics are unable to see the affirmative spirit the novel presents: despite the trio's diabolic gnawing, "the roots of life" are sustained because victory is not death's but life's. Conrad makes clear, as Leavis said of Lawrence, "the difference between what makes for life and that which makes against it."⁴⁷ The world may be like Schomberg's hotel in which humanity is

⁴³Lawrence, *Women in Love* 419.

⁴⁴Rieselbach, *Conrad's Rebels* 133.

⁴⁵Davidson, *Conrad's Endings* 101.

⁴⁶Baines, *Joseph Conrad* 400.

⁴⁷Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (London: Chatto, 1952) 284.

neglected or betrayed, but one need not despair as long as one retains "hope," "love," and "trust." This is what Conrad's moral imagination is all about. It is no wonder that Conrad chose Lena's dying scene for his public reading in the United States (May 1923).

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